

CEMETERY DANCE



FALL 1992 / Volume Four, Issue Four

\$4.00

**STEPHEN
KING**

**RAY
GARTON**

**RICK
HAUTALA**



THE STAND by STEPHEN KING

A PORTFOLIO OF ILLUSTRATION BY BERNI WRIGHTSON



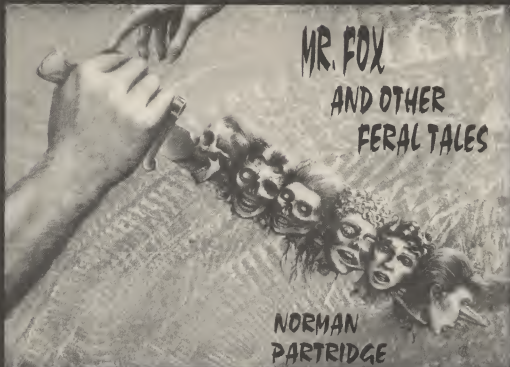
In 1984 Stephen King asked Berni Wrightson to begin work on illustrating the complete version of **THE STAND**. 12 beautiful pen & ink illustrations were produced and published in 1990. We have produced a portfolio of these drawings available in two editions.

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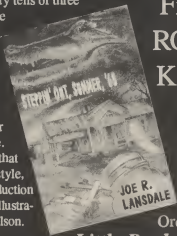
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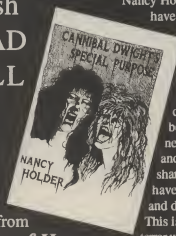
Norman's fiction is probably already familiar to most *Cemetery Dance* readers. If you haven't discovered him, this is a wonderful opportunity to sample the many facets of this exceptional new writer. His stories appear in *Dark at Heart*, *Final Shadows* and are included in the 1992

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CEMETERY DANCE MAGAZINE

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WORDS FROM THE EDITOR

RICHARD T. CHIZMAR

CEMETERY DANCE #14—Welcome back to another issue of *Cemetery Dance*, the magazine of dark mystery, suspense, and horror. If you have picked us up from a book or specialty store and are reading us for the first time . . . we hope you enjoy this Fall Issue. And we hope you are impressed enough to subscribe or keep an eye out for the Winter Issue, due in bookstores the second week of February.

♦ ♦ ♦

I usually reserve this editorial page for CD-related news and restrict my personal comments to the bare minimum. I like it that way. I think editorials are most effective when they are lean and clean and professional, not rambling and amateurish. So, when typing these words into the computer, I usually tend to stay firmly within character—as this magazine's publisher and editor.

But this time I want to get a little more personal.

For a couple of reasons.

First, I want to offer my most sincere and heartiest "thanks" to each and every person who has supported and continues to support CD Publications. Bookstore managers/owners, mail-order dealers, distributors, advertisers, printers, writers, artists, columnists, and, perhaps most importantly, all our subscribers. It's been a long road to where we are today, and an even longer journey awaits us . . . but so far we've had a helluva trip. Thanks to all of you, we've been able to publish 14 issues (each and every one right on schedule); we've been able to steadily increase our circulation past the five-figure mark; we've been able to increase our pay rates to the current professional status of 3-5 cents per word; we've been able to expand and add on a successful hardcover book imprint, with three titles to be published in 1992 and twice

that number in 1993; we've been able to stay healthy and prosperous—to grow—despite the agonizing slump this genre remains in.

Trust me, I'm not tooting our horn by highlighting these accomplishments. We've got a long, long way to go before we get to where we want to be—improved page design, more fiction each issue, better distribution to the bookstores and newsstands, and too many other things to mention here—but what I'm trying to express here is simply this: we've accomplished what we have thus far because of all of you (our faithful supporters) and we'll be around for a long time to come. That's a promise. So, it's overdue but it's also very sincere—thank you!

One more note before I wrap: Just over a decade ago, a friend of mine—high school English instructor extraordinaire, Richard Gallagher—introduced me to a novella of terror entitled "The Monkey" by a writer named Stephen King. More than anything else, reading that single piece of fiction shaped me into the writer, editor, and publisher I am today. It opened hidden doors and showed me secrets I never knew existed. It was pure magic.

Late last night I reread "The Monkey." I took my time, savoring the words. It still frightens me today, still sparkles, still holds that magic. Then, I reread "Chattering Teeth"—the novelette which appears later in this issue. I thought about the day I received the manuscript; thought about how much it meant to me, how much it still means to me. And I fell asleep with a smile on my face. A very big smile.

So, one more round of thanks to Shirley and Marsha up in Bangor, Chuck Verrill in NYC, and of course, Stephen.

Okay, it's finally time. Now, take my hand, turn up the lights, flip the page, and start the dance . . .

CHATTERY TEETH

STEPHEN KING

STEPHEN KING is the most popular writer of horror fiction in history. His most recent novels—both released in 1992—are *Gerald's Game* and *Dolores Claiborne*. The following novella, "Chatterly Teeth," is Stephen King at the top of his game, a wildly entertaining tale of supernatural terror.

Looking into the display case was like looking through a dirty pane of glass into the middle third of his boyhood, those years from seven to fourteen when he had been fascinated by stuff like this. Hogan leaned closer, forgetting the rising whine of the wind outside and the gritty *spick-spack* sound of sand hitting the windows. The case was full of fabulous junk, all of it undoubtedly made in Taiwan and Korea, but there was no doubt at all about the pick of the litter. They were the biggest Chatterly Teeth he'd ever seen. They were also the only ones he'd ever seen with feet—big orange cartoon shoes with white spats. A real scream.

Hogan looked up at the fat woman behind the counter. She was wearing a tee-shirt that said NEVADA IS GOD'S COUNTRY on top (the words swelling and receding across her enormous breasts) and about an acre of jeans on the bottom. She was selling a pack of cigarettes to a skinny young man with a lot of blonde hair tied back in a pony tail. The young man, who had the face of an intelligent rat, was paying in small change, counting it laboriously out of a grimy hand.

"Pardon me, ma'am?" Hogan asked.

She looked at him briefly, and then the back door banged open. A skinny man wearing a bandanna over his mouth and nose came in. The wind swirled gritty desert dust around him in a cyclone and rattled the pin-up cutie on the Valvoline calendar thumbtacked to the wall. The newcomer was pulling a handcart. Three wire-mesh cages were stacked on it. There was a tarantula in the one on top. In the cages below it were a pair of rattlesnakes. They were coiling rapidly back and forth and shaking their rattles in agitation.

"Shut the damn door, Scooter, was you born in a barn?" the woman behind the counter bawled.

He glanced at her briefly, eyes red and irritated from the blowing sand. "Gimme a chance, woman! Can't you see I got my hands full here? Ain't you got eyes? Christ!" He reached over the dolly and slammed the door. The dancing sand fell dead to the floor and he pulled the dolly toward the storeroom at the back, still muttering.

"That the last of em?" the woman asked.

"All but Wolf." He pronounced it *Woof*. "I'm gonna stick him in the lean-to back of the gas pumps."

"You ain't not!" the big woman retorted. "Wolf's our star attraction, in case you forgot. You get him in here. Radio says this is gonna get worse before it gets better. A lot worse."

"Just who do you think you're foolin'?" The skinny man (her husband, Hogan supposed) stood looking at her with a kind of weary truculence, his hands on his hips. "Damn thing ain't nothin but a Minnesota coydog, as anyone who took more'n half a look could plainly see."

The wind gusted, moaning along the eaves of Scooter's Grocery & Roadside Zoo, throwing sheaves of dry sand against the windows. It was getting worse, Hogan realized. He hoped he could drive out of it. He had promised Lita and Jack that he would be home by seven, eight at the latest, and he was a man who liked to keep his promises.

"Just take care of him," the big woman said, and turned irritably back to the rat-faced boy.

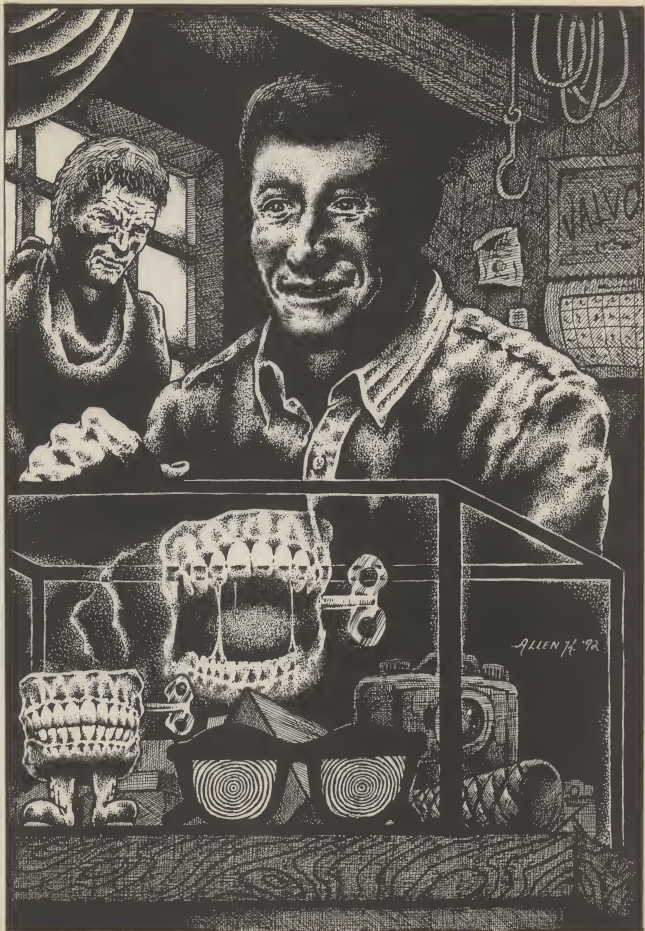
"Ma'am?" Hogan said again.

"Just a minute, hold your water," Mrs. Scooter said. She spoke with the air of one who is all but drowning in impatient customers, although Hogan and the rat-faced boy were in fact the only ones present.

"You're a dime short, Sunny Jim," she told the blonde kid after a quick glance at the coins on the counter-top.

The boy regarded her with wide, innocent eyes. "I don't suppose you'd trust me for it?"

"I doubt if the Pope of Rome smokes Merit 100's, but if he did, I wouldn't trust *him* for it."



The look of wide-eyed innocence disappeared. The rat-faced boy looked at her with an expression of sullen dislike for a moment (this expression looked much more at home on the kid's face, Hogan thought), and then slowly began to investigate his pockets again.

Just forget it and get out of here, Hogan thought. You'll never make it to L.A. by eight if you don't get moving, and this is one of those places that has only two speeds—slow and stop. You got your gas and paid for it, so just get back on the road before the storm gets any worse.

He almost followed his left brain's good advice . . . and then he looked at the Chatterly Teeth in the display case again, the Chatterly Teeth standing there on those big orange cartoon shoes. And white spats! That was the killer. Jack, his right brain told him, would love them. And tell the truth, Bill, old buddy: if it turns out *Jack* doesn't want them, *you* do. You may see another set of Jumbo Chatterly Teeth at some point in your life, anything's possible, but ones that also walk on big orange feet? Huh-uh. I really don't think so.

It was the right brain he listened to that time . . . and everything else followed.

The kid with the ponytail was still going through his pockets; the sullen expression on his face deepened each time he came up dry. Hogan was no fan of smoking — his father, a two-pack-a-day man, had died of lung cancer — but he had visions of still waiting to be waited on an hour from now. "Hey! Kid!"

The kid looked around and Hogan flipped him a quarter.

"Thanks, dude!"

"Think nothing of it."

The kid concluded his transaction with the beefy Mrs. Scooter. He put the cigarettes in one pocket and the remaining fifteen cents in another. He made no offer of the change to Hogan, who was not very surprised. Boys and girls like this were legion these days — they cluttered the highways from coast to coast, blowing along like tumbleweeds. Perhaps they had always been there, but to Hogan the current breed seemed both unpleasant and a little scary, like the rattlers Scooter was now storing in the back room.

The snakes in pissant little roadside menageries like this one couldn't kill you; their venom was bled twice a week and sold to clinics that made drugs with them. You could count on that just as you could count on the winos to show up at the local Red Cross every Tuesday and Thursday to sell their blood. But the snakes could still give you one hell of a painful bite if you made them mad and then got too close. That, Hogan thought, was what the current breed of road-kids had in common with them.

Mrs. Scooter came drifting down the counter, the

words on her tee-shirt drifting up and down and side to side as she did. "Whatcha need?" she asked. Her tone was still truculent. The west had a reputation for friendliness, and during the twenty years he had spent selling there Hogan had come to feel the reputation was deserved, but this woman had all the charm of a Brooklyn shopkeeper who has been stuck up three times in the last two weeks. Her kind was also on the rise, Hogan reflected.

"How much are these?" Hogan asked, pointing through the dirty glass. The case was filled with novelty items — Chinese finger-pullers, Pepper Gum, Dr. Wacky's Sneezing Powder, cigarette loads (A Laff Riot! according to the package — Hogan guessed they were more like a great way to get your teeth knocked out), X-ray glasses, plastic vomit (So Realistic!), joy-buzzers.

"I dunno," Mrs. Scooter said. "Where's the box, I wonder?"

The object of Hogan's interest was the only item in the case that wasn't packaged. A crudely lettered card beside them read JUMBO CHATTERLY TEETH! THEY WALK! They certainly *were* jumbo, Hogan thought — *super-jumbo*, in fact. They were five times the size of the sets of wind-up teeth which had so amused him as a kid growing up in Maine. Take away the joke feet and they would look like the teeth of some fallen Biblical giant — the cusps were big white blocks and the canine teeth looked like tentpegs sunk in the improbably red plastic gums. A key jutted from one gum. The teeth were held together in a clench by a thick rubber band.

Mrs. Scooter blew the dust from the Chatterly Teeth, then turned them over, looking on the soles of the orange shoes for a price sticker. She didn't find one. "I don't know," she said crossly, eyeing Hogan as if he might have taken the sticker off himself. "Only Scooter'd buy a piece of trash like that. Been around a thousand years. I'll have to ask him."

Hogan was suddenly tired of the woman and of Scooter's Grocery & Roadside Zoo. They were great Chatterly Teeth, and Jack would undoubtedly love them, but he had promised — eight at the latest.

"Never mind," he said. "I was just an—"

"Them teeth was supposed to go for \$5.95," Scooter said from behind them. "They ain't just plastic — those're metal teeth painted white. They could give you a helluva bite if they worked . . . but *she* dropped em on the floor two-three years ago when she was dustin' the inside of the case and they're busted."

"Oh," Hogan said, disappointed. "That's too bad. I never saw a pair with, you know, feet."

"There are lots of em like that now," Scooter said. "They sell em at the novelty stores in Vegas and Dry Springs. But I never saw a set as big as those. It was funnier'n hell to watch em walk across the floor, snap-

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pin' like a crocodile. Shame the old lady dropped em."

Scooter glanced at her, but his wife was looking out at the blowing sand. There was an expression on her face which Hogan couldn't quite decipher — was it sadness, or disgust, or both?

Scooter looked back at Hogan. "I could let em go for fifty cents, if you wanted em. We're gettin rid of the novelties, anyway. Gonna put rental video-tapes in that counter." He pulled the storeroom door closed. The bandanna was now pulled down, lying on the dusty front of his shirt. His face was haggard and too thin. Hogan saw what might have been the shadow of serious illness lurking just beneath his desert tan.

"You could do no such a thing, Scooter!" the big woman snapped, and turned toward him . . . almost turned *on* him.

"Shutcha head, Myra," Scooter told her. "You make my fillins ache."

"I told you to get Wolf—"

"If you want him back there in the storeroom, go get him yourself," he said. He began to advance on her, and Hogan was surprised — almost wonder-struck, in fact — when she gave ground. "Ain't nothin' but a Minnesota coydog anyway. Fifty cents for the teeth, friend, and for a buck you can take Myra's Woof, too. If you got five, I'll deed the whole place to you. Ain't worth a dogfart since the turnpike went through,

anyway."

The long-haired kid was standing by the door, tearing the top from the pack of cigarettes Hogan had helped buy, and watching this small comic opera with an expression of mean amusement. His small blue eyes gleamed, flicking back and forth between Scooter and his wife.

"Hell with you," Myra said gruffly, and Hogan realized she was close to tears. "If you won't get my sweet baby, I will." She stalked past him, almost striking him with one boulder-sized breast. Hogan thought it would have knocked the little man flat if it had connected.

"Look," Hogan said, "I think I'll just shove along."

"Aw, hell," Scooter said. "Don't mind Myra. I got cancer and she's got the change, and it ain't my problem she's havin the most trouble livin with. Take the teeth. Bet you got a boy might like em. Besides, it's probably just a cog knocked a little off-track. I bet a man who was handy could get em walkin' and chompin' again."

He looked around, his expression helpless and musing. Outside, the wind rose to a brief, thin shriek as the kid opened the door and slipped out. He had decided the show was over, apparently. A cloud of fine grit swirled down the middle aisle, between the canned goods and the dog food.

"I was pretty handy myself, at one time," Scooter confided.

Hogan did not reply for a long moment. He could not think of anything — quite literally not one single thing — to say. He looked down at the Jumbo Chatterly Teeth standing on the scratched and cloudy display case, nearly desperate to break the silence (now that Scooter was standing right in front of him, he could see that the man was more than pale — his eyes were huge and dark, glittering with pain and some heavy dope . . . Darvon, or perhaps morphine), and he spoke the first words that popped into his head: "Gee, they don't *look* broken."

He picked the teeth up. They were metal, all right — too heavy to be anything else — and when he looked through the slightly parted jaws, he was surprised at the size of the mainspring that ran the thing. He supposed it would take one that size to make the teeth not only chatter but walk, as well. What had Scooter said? *They could give you a helluva bite if they worked.* Hogan gave the thick rubber band an experimental tweak, then stripped it off. He was still looking at the teeth so he wouldn't have to look into Scooter's dark, pain-haunted eyes. He grasped the key and at last he risked a look up. He was relieved to see that now the thin man was smiling a little.

"Do you mind?" Hogan asked.

"Not me, pilgrim — let er rip."

Hogan turned the key. At first it was all right; there was a series of small, ratcheting clicks, and he could see the mainspring winding up. Then, on the third turn, there was a *sprunk!* noise from inside, and the key simply slid bonelessly around in its hole.

"See?"

"Yes," Hogan said. He set the teeth down on the counter. They simply stood there on their unlikely orange feet and did nothing.

Scooter poked the clenched molars on the lefthand side with the tip of one horny finger. The jaws of the teeth opened. One orange foot rose and took a dreamy half-step forward. Then the teeth stopped moving and the whole rig fell sideways. The Chatterly Teeth came to rest on the wind-up key, a slanted, disembodied grin out here in the middle of no-man's land. After a moment or two, the big teeth came together again with a slow (and rather ominous) click. That was all.

Hogan, who had never had a precognitive thought in his life, was suddenly filled with a clear certainty that was both eerie and sickening. *A year from now, this man will have been eight months in his grave, and if someone exhumed his coffin and pried off the lid, they'd see teeth just like these poking out of his dried-out dead face like some sort of animal trap — a set of footless Chatterly Teeth that don't work anymore. And why? Because something*

called cancer came along and knocked all of Scooter's cogs just a little off-track.

He glanced up into Scooter's eyes, glittering like dark gems in tarnished settings, and suddenly it was no longer a question of *wanting* to get out of here; he *had* to get out of here.

"Well," he said (hoping frantically that Scooter would not stick out his hand to be shaken). "I have to go. Best of luck to you, sir."

Scooter *did* put his hand out, but not to be shaken. Instead, he snapped the rubber band back around the Chatterly Teeth (Hogan had no idea why, since they didn't work), set them on their funny cartoon feet, and pushed them across the scratched surface of the counter. "Go on," he said. "Take em. No charge. Give em to your boy. He'll get a kick out of em standin' on the shelf in his room even if they don't work. I know a little about boys. Raised three of em."

"How did you know I had a son?" Hogan asked.

Scooter winked. The gesture was terrifying and pathetic at the same time. "Seen it in your face," he said. "Go on, take em."

The wind gusted again, this time hard enough to make the boards of the building moan. The sand hitting the windows sounded like fine snow. Hogan picked up the teeth by the plastic feet, surprised all over again by how heavy they were.

"Here," Scooter said. He produced a paper bag, almost as wrinkled and crumpled about the edges as his own face, from beneath the counter. "Stick em in here. That's a real nice sport-coat you got there. If you carry them choppers in the pocket, it'll get pulled out of shape."

He put the bag on the counter as if he understood how little Hogan wanted to touch him.

"Thanks," Hogan said. He put the Chatterly Teeth in the bag and rolled down the top. "My boy, Jack, thanks you, too."

Scooter smiled, revealing a set of teeth just as false (but nowhere near as large) as the ones in the paper bag. "My pleasure, mister. You drive careful until you get out of the blow. You'll be fine once you get in the foothills."

"I know." Hogan cleared his throat. "Thanks again. I hope you . . . uh . . . recover soon."

"That'd be nice," Scooter said evenly, "but I don't think it's in the cards, do you?"

"Uh. Well. Okay." Hogan realized with dismay that he didn't have the slightest idea how to conclude this encounter. "Take care of yourself."

Scooter nodded. "You too."

Hogan retreated toward the door, opened it, and had to hold on tight as the wind tried to rip it out of his hand and bang the wall. Fine sand scoured his face and he slitted his eyes against it.

He stepped out, closed the door behind him, and pulled the lapel of his real nice sport-coat over his mouth and nose as he crossed the porch, descended the steps, and headed toward the Dodge Fiesta camper-van parked just beyond the gas-pumps. The wind pulled his hair and the sand stung his cheeks. He was going around to the driver's side door when someone tugged his arm.

"Mister! Hey, mister!"

He turned. It was the blonde-haired boy. He hunched against the wind and blowing sand, wearing nothing but a tee-shirt and a pair of faded 501 jeans. Behind him, Mrs. Scooter was dragging a mangy beast on a choke-chain toward the back door of the store. Wolf the Minnesota Coydog looked like a half-starved German Shepherd pup — and the runt of the litter, at that.

"What?" Hogan shouted, knowing very well what.

"Can I have a ride?" the kid shouted back over the wind.

Hogan did not ordinarily pick up hitchhikers — not since one afternoon five years ago. He had stopped for a young girl on the outskirts of Tonapah. Standing by the side of the road, the girl had resembled one of those sad-eyed waifs in the velvet paintings you could buy in the discount stores, a kid who looked like her mother and her last friend had both died in the same housefire about a month ago. Once she was in the car, however, Hogan had seen the bad skin and mad eyes of the long-time junkie. By then it had been too late. She had stuck a pistol in his face and demanded his wallet. The pistol was old and rusty. Its grip was wrapped in tattered electrician's tape. Hogan had doubted if it was loaded, or if it would fire if it was . . . but he had a wife and a kid back in L.A., and even if he had been single, was a hundred and forty bucks worth risking your life over? He hadn't thought so even then, when he had just been getting his feet under him in his new line of work. He gave the girl his wallet. By then her boyfriend had been parked beside the van (in those days it had been a Ford Econoline, nowhere near as nice as the Fiesta XRT) in a dirty blue sedan. Hogan asked the girl if she would leave him his driver's license, and the pictures of Lita and Jack. "Fuck you, sugar," she said, and slapped him across the face, hard, with his own wallet before getting out and running to the blue car.

Hitchhikers were trouble.

But the storm was getting worse, and the kid didn't even have a jacket. What was he supposed to tell him? Fuck you, sugar, crawl under a rock until the wind drops?

"Get in," he said.

"Thanks, dude! Thanks a lot!"

The kid ran toward the passenger door, tried it,

found it locked, and just stood there, waiting to be let in, hunching his shoulders up around his ears. The wind billowed out the back of his shirt like a sail, revealing glimpses of his thin, pimple-studded back.

Hogan glanced back at Scooter's Grocery & Roadside Zoo as he went around to the driver's door. Scooter was standing at the window, looking out at him. He raised his hand, solemnly, palm out. Hogan raised his own in return, then slipped his key into the lock and turned it. He opened the door, pushed the unlock button next to the power window switch, and motioned for the kid to get in.

He did, then had to use both hands to pull the door shut again. The wind howled around the Fiesta, actually making it rock a little from side to side.

"Wow!" the kid gasped, and rubbed his fingers briskly through his hair (it had come loose from the rubber band and now it lay on his shoulders in lank clots). "Some storm, huh?"

"Yeah," Hogan said. There was a console between the two front seats — the kind of seats the brochures liked to call "captain's chairs" — and Hogan placed the paper bag in one of the cup-holders. Then he turned the ignition key. The engine started at once with a good-tempered rumble.

The kid twisted around in his seat and looked appreciatively into the back of the van. There was a bed (now folded back into a couch), a small LP gas stove, several storage compartments where Hogan kept his various sample cases, and a toilet cubicle at the rear.

"Not bad, dude!" the kid said. "All the comforts." He glanced back at Hogan. "Where you headed?"

"Los Angeles."

The kid grinned. "Hey, great! So am I!" He took out his just-purchased pack of Merits and tapped one loose.

Hogan had put on his headlights and dropped the transmission into drive. Now he shoved the gearshift back into park and turned to the kid. "Let's get a couple of things straight," he said.

The kid gave Hogan his wide-eyed innocent look. "Sure, dude — you bet."

"First, I don't pick up hitchhikers as a rule. I had a bad experience with one a few years back. It vaccinated me. I'll take you through the Santa Clara foothills. There's a truckstop on the other side — Sammy's. It's close to the turnpike. That's where we part company. Okay?"

"Okay. Sure, dude. You bet." Still with the wide-eyed look.

"Second, if you really have to smoke, we part company right now. *That* okay?"

For just a moment Hogan saw the kid's other look (and even on short acquaintance, Hogan was almost

willing to bet the kid only had the two) — the mean, watchful look, and then he was all wide-eyed, sure-you-bet-right-on-dude innocence again. He tucked the cigarette behind his ear and showed Hogan his empty hands.

"No prob," he said. "Okay?"

"Okay. Bill Hogan." He held out his hand.

"Bryan Adams," the kid said, and shook Hogan's hand briefly.

Hogan dropped the transmission into drive again and began to roll slowly toward Route 46. As he did, his eyes dropped briefly to a cassette box lying on the dashboard. It was *Reckless*, by Bryan Adams.

Sure, he thought. You're Bryan Adams and I'm really Don Henley. We just stopped by Scooter's Grocery & Roadside Zoo to get a little material for our next albums, right dude?

As he pulled out onto the highway, already straining to see through the blowing dust, he found himself thinking of the girl again, the one outside of Tonapah who had slapped him across the face with his own wallet before fleeing. He was starting to get a very bad feeling about this.

Then a hard gust of wind tried to push him into the eastbound lane, and he concentrated on his driving.

They rode in silence for awhile. When Hogan glanced once to his right he saw the kid was lying back with his eyes closed — maybe asleep, maybe dozing, maybe just pretending because he didn't want to talk. That was okay; Hogan didn't want to talk, either. For one thing, he didn't know what he might have to say to Mr. Bryan Adams from Nowhere, U.S.A. It was a cinch young Mr. Adams wasn't in the market for labels or universal price-code readers, which was what Hogan sold. For another, he needed all his concentration for driving.

As Mrs. Scooter had warned, the storm was intensifying. The road was a dim phantom crossed at irregular intervals by tan ribs of sand. These drifts were like speed-bumps, and they forced Hogan to creep along at no more than twenty-five. He could live with that. At some points, however, the sand had spread more evenly across the road's surface, camouflaging it, and then Hogan had to drop down to fifteen miles an hour, navigating by the dim bounceback of his headlights from the reflector-posts which marched along the side of the road.

Every now and then an approaching car or truck would loom out of the blowing sand like a prehistoric phantom with round blazing eyes. One of these, an old Lincoln Mark IV as big as a cabin cruiser, was driving straight down the center of 46. Hogan hit the

horn and squeezed right, feeling the suck of the sand against his tires, feeling his lips peel away from his teeth in a helpless snarl. Just as he became sure the oncomer was going to force him into the ditch, the Lincoln swerved back onto its own side just enough for Hogan to make it by. He thought he heard the metallic click of his bumper kissing off the Mark IV's rear bumper, but given the steady shriek of the wind, that was almost certainly his own imagination. He *did* catch just a glimpse of the driver — an old bald-headed man sitting bolt-upright behind the wheel, peering into the blowing sand with a concentrated glare that was almost maniacal. Hogan shook his fist at him, but the old codger did not so much as glance at him. *Probably didn't even realize I was there*, Hogan thought, *let alone how close he came to hitting me.*

For a few seconds he was very close to going off the road anyway. He could feel the sand sucking harder at the rightside wheels, felt the Fiesta trying to tip. His instinct was to twist the wheel hard to the left. Instead, he fed the van gas and only urged it in that direction, feeling sweat dampen his last good shirt at the armpits. At last the suck on the tires diminished and he began to feel in control of the van again. Hogan blew his breath out in a long sigh.

"Good piece of driving, dude."

His attention had been so focused he had forgotten his passenger, and in his surprise he almost twisted the wheel all the way to the left, which would have put them in trouble again. He looked around and saw the blonde kid watching him. His gray-green eyes were unsettlingly bright; there was no sign of sleepiness in them.

"It was just luck," Hogan said. "If there was a place to pull over, I would . . . but I know this piece of road. It's Sammy's or bust. Once we're in the foothills, it'll get better."

The thing was, he did not add, it might take them three hours to cover the seventy miles between here and there.

"You're a salesman, right?"

"Right."

"Right."

He wished the kid wouldn't talk. He wanted to concentrate on his driving. Up ahead, fog-lights loomed out of the murk like yellow ghosts. They were followed by an Iroc Z with California plates. The Fiesta and the Z crept past each other like old ladies in a nursing home corridor. In the corner of his eye, Hogan saw the kid take the cigarette from behind his ear and begin to play with it. Bryan Adams indeed. Why had the kid given him a false name? It was like something out of an old Republic movie, the kind of thing you could still see on the late-late show, a black-and-white crime movie where the travelling salesman

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(probably played by Ray Milland) picks up the tough young con (played by Nick Adams, maybe) who has just broken out of jail in Gabbs or Deeth or some place like that—

"What do you sell, dude?"

"Labels."

"Labels?"

"That's right. The ones with the universal price code on them. It's a little block with a pre-set number of black bars in it."

The kid surprised Hogan by nodding. "Sure — they whip em over an electric-eye gadget in the super-market and the price shows up on the cash register like magic, right?"

"Yes. Except it's not magic, and it's not an electric eye. It's a laser reader. I sell those, too. Both the big ones and the portables."

"Far out, dude." The tinge of sarcasm in the kid's voice was faint . . . but it was there.

"Bryan?"

"Yeah?"

"The name's Bill, not dude."

He found himself wishing more and more strongly that he could roll back in time to Scooter's, and just say no when the kid asked him for a ride. The Scooters weren't bad sorts; they would have let the kid stay until the storm blew itself out this evening. Maybe Mrs. Scooter would even have given him five bucks to babysit the tarantula, the rattlers, and Woof, the Amazing Minnesota Coydog. Hogan found himself liking those gray-green eyes less and less. He could feel their weight on his face, like small stones.

"Yeah — Bill. Bill the Label Dude."

Bill didn't reply. The kid laced his fingers together and bent his hands backward, cracking the knuckles.

"Well, it's like my old mamma used to say — it may not be much, but it's a living. Right, Label Dude?"

Hogan grunted something noncommittal and concentrated on his driving. The feeling that he had made a mistake had grown to a certainty. When he'd picked up the girl that time, God had let him get away with it. *Please*, he prayed. *One more time, okay, God? Better yet, let me be wrong about this kid — let it just be paranoia brought on by low barometer, high winds, and the coincidence of a name that can't, after all, be that uncommon.*

Here came a huge Mack truck from the other direction, the silver bulldog atop the grille seeming to peer into the flying grit. Hogan squeezed right until he felt the sand piled up along the edge of the road grabbing greedily at his tires again. The long silver box the Mack was pulling blotted out everything on Hogan's left side. It was six inches away — maybe even less — and it seemed to pass forever.

When it was finally gone, the blonde kid asked: "You look like you're doin' pretty well, Bill — rig like this must have set you back at least thirty big ones. So why—"

"It was a lot less than that." Hogan didn't know if 'Bryan Adams' could hear the edgy note in his voice, but *he* sure could. "I did a lot of the work myself."

"All the same, you sure ain't staggerin' around hungry. So why aren't you up above all this shit, flying the friendly skies?"

It was a question Hogan had often asked himself in the long empty miles between Tempe and Tucson or Las Vegas and Los Angeles, the kind of question you *had* to ask yourself when you couldn't find anything on the radio but crappy syntho-pop or threadbare oldies and you'd listened to the last cassette of the current best-seller from Books on Tape, when there was nothing to look at but miles of gullywashes and scrubland, all of it owned by Uncle Sam.

He could say that he got a better feel for his customers and their needs by travelling through the country where his customers lived and sold their goods, and it was true, but it wasn't the reason. He could say that checking his sample cases, which were much too bulky to fit under an airline seat, was a pain in the ass and waiting for them to show up on the conveyor belt at the other end was always an adventure (he'd once had a packing case filled with five thousand soft-drink labels show up in Hilo, Hawaii, instead of Hilsdale, New Mexico). That was *also* true, but it also wasn't the reason.

The reason was that in 1982 he had been on board a Western Pride commuter flight which had crashed in the high country seventeen miles north of Reno. Fifteen of the nineteen passengers on board and both crew-members had been killed. Hogan had suffered a broken back. He had spent four months in bed and another ten in a heavy brace his wife Lita called the Iron Maiden. They (whoever *they* were) said that if you got thrown from a horse, you should get right back on. William I. Hogan said that was bullshit, and with the exception of a white-knuckle, two-Valium flight to attend his brother's wedding in Oakland, he had never been on a plane since.

He came out of these thoughts all at once, realizing two things: he had had the road to himself since the passage of the Mack, and the kid was still looking at him with those unsettling eyes, waiting for him to answer the question.

"I had a bad experience on a commuter flight once," he said. "Since then, I've pretty much stuck to transport where you can coast into the breakdown lane if your engine quits."

"You sure have had a lot of bad experiences, Bill-dude," the kid said. A tone of bogus regret crept

into his voice. "And now you're gonna have another one." There was a sharp metallic click. Hogan looked over and was not very surprised to see the kid was holding a switchknife with a glittering eight-inch blade.

Oh shit, Hogan thought. Now that it was here, now that it was right in front of him, he didn't feel very scared. Only tired. Oh shit, and only four hundred miles from home. Goddam.

"Pull over, Bill-dude. Nice and slow."

"What do you want?"

"If you really don't know the answer to that one, you're even dumber than you look." A little smile played around the corners of the kid's mouth. "I want your dough, and I want your van. But don't worry — there's this little truck-stop not too far from here. Sammy's. Close to the turnpike. Someone'll give you a ride. The people who don't stop will look at you like you're dogshit they found on their shoe, of course, and you might have to beg a little, but I'm sure you'll get a ride in the end. Now *pull over.*"

Hogan was surprised to find that he felt more than tired — he felt angry, as well. Had he been angry at the girl who had stolen his wallet that other time? He couldn't honestly remember.

"Look," he said, turning to the kid. "I gave you a ride when you needed one, and I didn't make you beg for it. If it wasn't for me, you'd be back at Scooter's, eating sand with your thumb out. So why don't you just put that thing away? We'll—"

The kid suddenly lashed forward with the knife, and Hogan felt a thread of burning pain across his right hand. The van swerved, then shuddered as it passed over another of those sandy speed-bumps.

"Pull over, I said. You're either walking, salesman, or you're lying in the nearest gully with your throat cut and one of your own price-reading gadgets jammed up your ass. I get what's in your wallet either way. The van, too. I'm going to chain-smoke all the way to Los Angeles, and you know what? Each time I finish a cigarette I'm going to butt it out on your dashboard."

Hogan glanced down at his hand and saw a diagonal line of blood which stretched from the last knuckle of his pinky to the base of his thumb. And here was the anger again . . . only now it was something close to rage, and if the tiredness was still there, it was buried somewhere in the middle of that irrational red eye. He tried to summon a mental picture of Lita and Jack to damp that feeling down before it got the better of him and made him do something crazy, but the images were fuzzy and out of focus. There *was* a clear image in his mind, but it was the wrong one — it was the face of the girl outside of Tonapah, the girl with the snarling mouth below the big dime-store waif eyes, the girl who had said *Fuck you, sugar* before slapping him across the face with his own wallet.

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He stepped down on the gas-pedal and the Fiesta began to move faster. The red needle moved past thirty.

The kid looked surprised, then puzzled, then angry. "What are you doing? I told you to pull over! Do you want your guts in your lap, or what?"

"I don't know," Hogan said. He kept his foot on the gas. Now the needle was trembling just above forty. The van ran across a series of dunelets and shivered like a dog with a fever. "What do *you* want, kid. How about a broken neck. All it takes is one twist of the wheel. I fastened *my* seatbelt. I notice you forgot yours."

The kid's gray-green eyes were huge now, glittering with a mixture of fear and fury. You're supposed to pull over, those eyes said. That's the way it's supposed to work when I'm holding a knife on you — don't you *know* that?

"You won't wreck us," the kid said, but Hogan thought he was trying to convince himself.

"Why not?" Hogan turned toward the kid again. "After all, I'm pretty sure I'll walk away, and the van's insured. You call the play, asshole. What about that?"

"You—" the kid began, and then his eyes widened and he lost all interest in Hogan. "*Look out!*" he screamed.

Hogan snapped his eyes forward and saw four huge white headlights bearing down on him through the flying wrack outside. It was a tanker truck, probably carrying gasoline, propane, or maybe fertilizer. An air-horn beat the air like the cry of a gigantic, enraged goose: *WHONK! WHONK! WHONNK!*

The Fiesta had drifted while Hogan was trying to deal with the kid; now *he* was the one halfway across the road. He yanked the wheel hard to the right, knowing it would do no good, knowing it was already too late. But the approaching truck was also moving, squeezing over just as Hogan had done to try and accommodate the Mark IV. The two vehicles danced past each other through the flying sand with less than a gasp between them. Hogan felt his rightside wheels bite into the sand again and knew that this time he didn't have a chance in hell of holding the van on the road — not at forty-two miles an hour. As the dim shape of the big steel tank (CARTER'S DAIRY MILK FROM CONTENTED COWS was painted along the side) slid from view, he felt the steering wheel go mushy in his hands, dragging further to the right. And from the corner of his eye, he saw the kid lunge forward with his knife.

What's the matter with you, are you crazy? he wanted to scream, but there was no time left for screaming, and besides, he already knew the answer — of course the kid was crazy. That was the message in those gray-green eyes, and it had been there long before the kid

pulled the knife. Pure craziness.

He tried his level best to plant the blade in Hogan's neck, but the van had begun to tilt by then, running deeper and deeper into the sand-choked gully. Hogan pulled back from the blade, letting go of the wheel, and thought he had gotten clear until he felt the wet warmth of blood drench the side of his neck. The knife had unzipped his right cheek from jaw to temple. He flailed with his right hand, trying to get the kid's wrist, and then the Fiesta's left front wheel struck a rock the size of a pay telephone and the van flipped high and hard, like a stunt vehicle in one of those movies this rootless kid undoubtedly loved. It rolled in midair, all four wheels turning, still doing thirty miles an hour according to the speedometer, and Hogan felt his seatbelt lock painfully across his chest and belly. It was like reliving the plane-crash — now, as then, he could not get it through his head that this was really happening.

The kid was thrown upward and forward, still holding onto the knife. His head bounced off the roof as the van's top and bottom swapped places. Hogan saw his left hand waving wildly, and realized with amazement that the kid was *still* trying to stab him. The kid was a rattler, all right, he'd been right about that, but no one had milked his poison sacs.

Then the van struck the desert hardpan, peeling off the luggage racks, and the kid's head connected with the roof again, much harder this time. The knife was jolted from his hand. The cabinets at the rear of the van sprang open, spraying sample-books and laser label-readers everywhere. Hogan was dimly aware of an inhuman screaming sound — the long, drawn-out squall of the Fiesta's roof sliding across the gravelly desert surface on the far side of the gully — and thought: *So this is what it would be like to be inside a tin can when someone was using the opener.*

The windshield shattered, blowing inward in a sagging shield clouded by a million zig-zagging cracks. Hogan shut his eyes and threw his hands up to shield his face as the van continued to roll, thumping down on Hogan's side long enough to shatter the driver's side window and admit a rattle of rocks and dusty earth before staggering upright again. It rocked as if meaning to go over on the kid's side . . . and then came to rest.

Hogan sat where he was without moving for perhaps five seconds, eyes wide, hands gripping the armrests of his chair. He was aware there was a lot of dirt and crumbled glass in his lap, and something else as well, but not what the something else was. He was also aware of the wind, blowing more dirt through the Fiesta's broken windows.

Then his vision was blocked by a moving object. The object was a mottle of white skin, brown dirt, raw

knuckles, and red blood. It was a fist, and it struck Hogan squarely in the nose. The agony was immediate and intense, as if someone had fired a flare-gun directly up into his brain. For a moment his vision was gone, swallowed in a vast white flash. It had just begun to come back when the kid's hands suddenly clamped around his neck and he could no longer breathe.

The kid, Mr. Bryan Adams from Nowhere, U.S.A., was leaning over the console between the front seats. Blood from perhaps half a dozen different scalp wounds had flowed over his cheeks and forehead and nose like warpaint. His gray-green eyes stared at Hogan with fixed, lunatic fury.

"Look what you did, you numb fuck!" the kid shouted. "Look what you did to me!"

Hogan tried to pull back, and got half a breath when the kid's hold slipped momentarily, but with his seatbelt still buckled — and still locked down, from the feel — there was really nowhere he could go. The kid's hands were back almost at once, and this time his thumbs were pressing into his windpipe, pinching it shut.

Hogan tried to bring his own hands up, but the kid's arms, as rigid as prison bars, blocked him. He tried to knock the kid's arms away, but they wouldn't budge. Now he could hear another wind — a high, roaring wind inside his own head.

"Look what you did, you stupid shit! I'm bleedin'!"

The kid's voice, but further away than it had been.

He's killing me, Hogan thought, and a voice replied: Right — fuck you, sugar.

That brought the anger back. He groped in his lap for whatever was there. It was a paper bag. Some bulky object inside it. Hogan closed his hand around it and pistoned his fist upward toward the shelf of the kid's jaw. It connected with a heavy thud. The kid screamed in surprised pain, and his grip on Hogan's throat was suddenly gone as he fell over backward.

Hogan pulled in a deep, convulsive breath and heard a sound like a teakettle howling to be taken off the burner. *Is that me, making that sound? My God, is that me?*

He dragged in another breath. It was full of flying dust, it hurt his throat and made him cough, but it was heaven all the same. He looked down at his fist and saw the shape of the Chatterly Teeth clearly outlined against the brown bag.

And suddenly felt them move.

There was something so shockingly human in this movement that Hogan shrieked and dropped the bag at once; it was as if he had picked up a human jawbone which had tried to speak to his hand.

The bag hit the kid's back and then tumbled to the van's carpeted floor as 'Bryan Adams' pushed himself groggily to his knees. Hogan heard the rubber

band snap . . . and then the unmistakable click and chutter of the teeth themselves, opening and closing.

It's probably just a cog knocked a little off-track, Scooter had said. I bet a man who was handy could get em walkin' and chompin' again.

Or maybe just a good knock would do it, Hogan thought. If I live through this and ever get back that way, I'll have to tell Scooter that all you have to do to fix a pair of malfunctioning Chatterly Teeth is roll your van over and then use them to hit a psychotic hitchhiker who's trying to strangle you.

The Chatterly Teeth clattered away inside the torn brown bag; the sides fluttered, making it look like an amputated lung which refused to die. The kid crawled away from the bag without even looking at it — crawled toward the back of the van, shaking his head from side to side, trying to clear it. Blood flew from the clots of his hair in a fine spray.

Hogan found the clasp of his seatbelt and pushed the pop-release. Nothing happened. The square in the center of the buckle did not give even a little and the belt itself was still locked as tight as a cramp, cutting into the middle-aged roll of fat above the waistband of his trousers and pushing a hard diagonal across his chest. He tried rocking back and forth in the seat, hoping that would unlock the belt. The flow of blood from his face increased, and he could feel his cheek flapping back and forth like a strip of dried wallpaper, but that was all. He felt panic struggling to break through amazed shock, and twisted his head over his right shoulder to see what the kid was up to.

The kid was up to no good. He had spotted his knife at the far end of the van, lying atop a litter of instructional manuals and brochures. He grabbed it, flicked his hair away from his face, and peered back over his own shoulder at Hogan. He was grinning, and there was something in that grin that made Hogan's balls simultaneously tighten and shrivel until it felt as if someone had tucked a couple of peach-pits into his Johnny shorts.

Ah, here it is! the kid's grin said. *For a minute or two there I was worried — quite seriously worried — but everything is going to come out all right after all. Things got a little improvisational there for awhile, but now we're back to the script.*

"You stuck, Label Dude?" the kid asked over the steady shriek of the wind. "You are, ain't you? Good thing you buckled your belt, right? Good thing for me."

The kid tried to get up, almost made it, and then his knees buckled. An expression of surprise so magnified it would have been comic under other circumstances crossed his face. Then he flicked his blood-greasy hair out of his face again and began to crawl toward Hogan, his left hand wrapped around the

imitation bone handle of the knife.

Hogan grasped the seatbelt buckle with both hands and drove his thumbs against the pop-release as enthusiastically as the kid had driven his into Hogan's windpipe. There was absolutely no response. The belt was frozen. He craned his neck to look at the kid again.

The kid had made it as far as the fold-up bed and then stopped. That expression of large, comic surprise had resurfaced on his face. He was staring straight ahead, which meant he was looking at something on the floor, and Hogan suddenly remembered the teeth. They were still chattering away.

He looked down in time to see the Jumbo Chatter Teeth march from the open end of the torn paper bag on their funny orange shoes. The molars and the canines and the incisors chopped rapidly up and down, producing a sound like ice in a cocktail glass. The shoes, dressed up in their tiny white spats, almost seemed to *bounce* along the gray carpet. Hogan found himself thinking of Fred Astaire tap-dancing his way across stage and back again, Fred Astaire with a cane tucked under his arm and a straw boater cocked saucily back on his head.

"Oh shit!" the kid said, half-laughing. "Is that what you were dickering' for? Oh, man! I kill you, Label Dude, I'm gonna be doin' the world a favor."

The key, Hogan thought. The key isn't turning.

And he suddenly had another of those precognitive flashes; he understood exactly what was going to happen.

The kid is going to reach for them.

The teeth abruptly stopped walking and chattering. They simply stood there on the slightly tilted floor of the van, jaws slightly agape. Eyeless, they still seemed to peer up quizzically at the kid.

"Chatter Teeth," Mr. Bryan Adams, from Nowhere, U.S.A., marvelled. He reached out and curled his right hand around them, just as Hogan had known he would.

"Bite him!" Hogan shrieked. "Bite his fucking fingers *right off!*"

The kid's head snapped up, the gray-green eyes wide with startlement. He gaped at Hogan for a moment—that big expression of totally dumb surprise—and then he began to laugh. His laughter was high and shrieky, a perfect complement to the wind howling through the Fiesta and billowing the curtains like long ghost-hands.

"Bite me! Bite me! *Biiiite me!*" the kid chanted, as if it was the punchline to the funniest joke he'd ever heard. "Hey, Label Dude! I thought I was the one who bumped my head!"

The kid clamped the handle of the switchblade in his own teeth and stuck the forefinger of his left hand between the Jumbo Chatter Teeth. "It's ee!" he said

around the knife. He giggled and wiggled his finger between the oversized jaws. "It's ee! O on, it's ee!"

The teeth didn't move. Neither did the orange feet. Hogan's premonition collapsed around him the way dreams do upon waking.

The kid wiggled his finger between the Chatter Teeth one more time, then began to pull his finger free. Suddenly he screamed in pain, and for a moment Hogan's heart leaped in his chest.

"*Oh shit! MotherFUCKER!*" the kid screamed, but he was laughing at the same time, and the teeth, of course, had never moved.

The kid lifted the teeth up for a closer look as he grabbed his knife again. He shook the long blade at the Chatter Teeth like a teacher shaking his pointer at a naughty student. "You shouldn't bite," he said. "That's very bad behavior—"

One of the orange feet took a sudden step forward on the grimy palm of the kid's hand. The jaws opened at the same time, and before Hogan was fully aware of what was happening, the Chatter Teeth had closed on the kid's nose.

This time Bryan Adams's scream was real—a thing of agony and ultimate surprise. He flailed at the teeth with his right hand, trying to bat them away, but they were locked on his nose as tightly as Hogan's seatbelt was locked around his middle. Blood and filaments of torn gristle burst out between the canines in red strings. The kid jackknifed backward and for a moment Hogan could see only his flailing body, lashing elbows, and kicking feet. Then he saw the glitter of the knife.

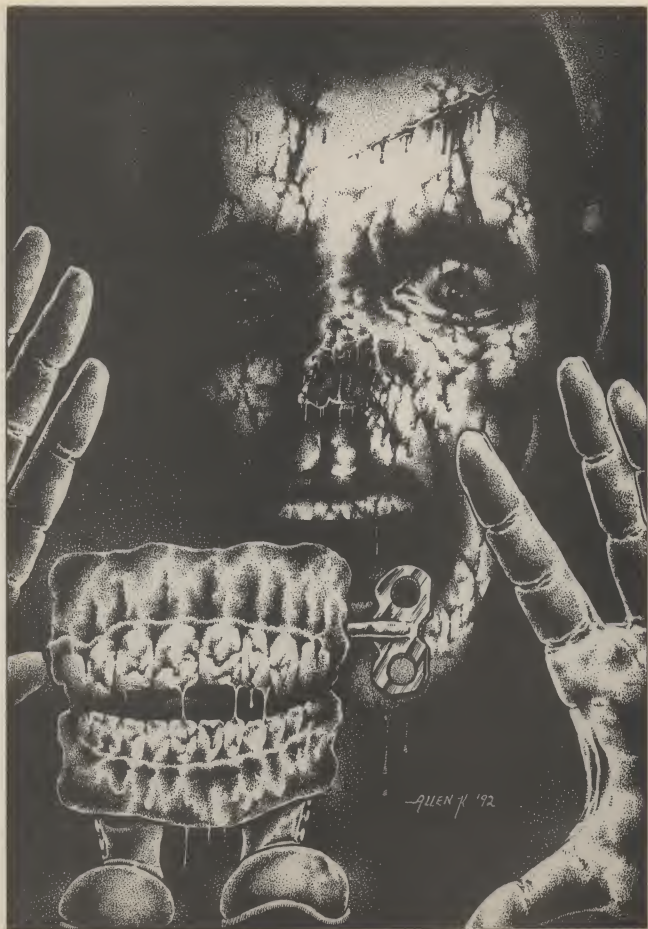
The kid screamed again and bolted into a sitting position. His long hair had fallen over his face in a curtain; the clamped teeth stuck out like the rudder of some strange boat. The kid had somehow managed to insert the blade of his knife between the teeth and what remained of his nose.

"Kill him!" Hogan shouted hoarsely. He had lost his mind; on some level he understood that he *must* have lost his mind, but for the time being, that didn't matter. "*Go on, kill him!*"

The kid shrieked—a long, piercing firewhistle sound—and twisted the knife. The blade snapped, but not before it had managed to pry the disembodied jaws at least partway open. The teeth fell off his face and into his lap. Most of the kid's nose was still impaled on that wide, naked grin.

The kid shook his hair back. His gray-green eyes were crossed, trying to look down at the mangled stump which had once been his nose. His mouth was drawn down in a rictus of pain; the tendons in his neck stood out like pulley-wires.

The kid reached for the teeth. The teeth stepped nimbly backward on their orange cartoon feet. They



were nodding up and down, marching in place, grinning at the kid, who was now sitting with his ass on his calves. Blood drenched the front of his tee-shirt.

The kid said something then that confirmed Hogan's belief that he, Hogan, had lost his mind; only in a fantasy born of delirium would such words be spoken.

"Give bme bag by *dose*, you sud-of-a-biditch!"

The kid reached for the teeth again and this time they ran *forward*, under his snatching hand, between his spread legs, and there was a meaty *chump!* sound as they closed on the bulge of faded blue denim just below the place where the zipper of the kid's jeans ended.

Bryan Adams's eyes flew wide open. So did his mouth. His hands rose to the level of his shoulders, springing wide open, as if he meant to conduct the opening movement of some amazing symphony. The switchknife flew over his shoulder to the back of the van.

"Jesus! Jesus! Jeeeeeeee —"

The orange feet were pumping rapidly, as if doing a Highland Fling. The pink jaws of the Jumbo Chatterly Teeth nodded rapidly up and down, as if saying *yes! yes! yes!* and then shook back and forth, just as rapidly as if saying *no! no! no!*

"—eeeeeeEEEEEEEE —"

As the cloth of the kid's jeans began to rip — and that was not all that was ripping, by the sound — Bill Hogan passed out.

He came to twice. The first time must have been only a short while later, because the storm was still howling through and around the van, and the light was about the same. He started to turn around, but a monstrous bolt of pain shot up his neck. Whiplash, of course, and probably not as bad as it could have been . . . or would be tomorrow, for that matter.

Always supposing he lived until tomorrow.

The kid. I have to look and make sure he's dead.

No, you don't. Of course he's dead. If he wasn't, you would be.

Now he began to hear a new sound from behind him — the steady chutter-click-chutter of the teeth.

They're coming for me. They've finished with the kid, but they're still hungry, so they're coming for me.

He placed his hands on the seatbelt buckle again, but the pop-release was still hopelessly jammed, and his hands seemed to have no strength, anyway.

The teeth grew steadily closer — they were right in back of his seat, now, from the sound — and Hogan's confused mind read a rhyme into their ceaseless chomping: *Clickety-clickety-clickety-clack! We are the teeth, and we're coming back! Watch us walk, watch us chew,*

we ate him, now we'll eat you!

Hogan closed his eyes.

The clittering sound stopped.

Now there was only the ceaseless whine of the wind and the *spick-spak* of sand striking the dented side of the Fiesta.

Hogan waited. After a long, long time, he heard a single click, followed by the minute sound of tearing fibers. There was a pause, then the click and the tearing sound was repeated.

What's it doing?

The third time the click and the small tearing sound came, he felt the back of his seat moving a little and understood. The teeth were pulling themselves up to where he was. Somehow they were pulling themselves up to him.

Hogan thought of the teeth closing on the bulge of the kid's balls and willed himself to pass out again. Sand flew in through the broken windshield, tickled his cheeks and forehead.

Click . . . rip. Click . . . rip. Click . . . rip.

The last one was very close. Hogan didn't want to look down, but he was unable to help himself. And beyond his right hip, where the seat cushion met the seat's back, he saw a wide white grin. It moved upward with agonizing slowness, pushing with the as-yet-unseen orange feet as it nipped a small fold of gray seat-cover between its incisors . . . then the jaws let go and it lurched convulsively upward.

This time what the teeth fastened on was the pocket of Hogan's slacks, and he passed out again.

When he came to the second time, the wind had dropped and it was almost dark; the air had taken on a queer purple shade Hogan could not remember ever having seen in the desert before. The swirls of sand running across the desert floor beyond the sagging ruin of the windshield looked like fleeing ghost-children.

For a moment he could remember nothing at all of what had happened to land him here; the last clear memory he could touch was of looking at his gas-gauge, seeing it was down to an eighth, then looking up and seeing a sign at the side of the road which said **SCOOTER'S GROCERY & ROADSIDE ZOO GAS SNAX COLD BEER SEE LIVE RATLESNAKES!**

He understood that he could hold onto this amnesia for awhile, if he wanted to; given a little time, his subconscious might even be able to wall off subsequent memories permanently. But it could be *dangerous* not to remember. It could be *very* dangerous. Because—

The wind gusted. Sand rattled against the badly dented driver's side of the van. It sounded almost like *(teeth! the teeth! the Chatterly Teeth!)*

The fragile surface of his amnesia shattered, letting everything pour through, and all the heat fell from the surface of Hogan's skin. He uttered a rusty squawk as he remembered the sound

(chump!)

the teeth had made as they closed on the kid's balls, and he closed his hands over his own crotch, eyes rolling fearfully in their sockets as he looked for the runaway teeth.

He didn't see them, but the ease with which his shoulders followed the movement of his hands was new. He looked down at his lap and slowly removed his hands from his crotch. His seatbelt was no longer holding him prisoner. It lay on the gray carpet in two pieces. The metal tongue of the pull-up section was still buried inside the buckle, but beyond it there was only ragged red fabric. The belt had not been cut; it had been gnawed through.

He looked up into the rear-view mirror and saw something else: the back doors of the Fiesta were standing open, and there was only a vague, man-shaped red outline on the gray carpet where the kid had been. Mr. Bryan Adams, from Nowhere, U.S.A., was gone.

And so were the Chatterly Teeth.

Hogan got out of the van slowly, like an old man afflicted with a terrible case of arthritis. He found that if he held his head perfectly level, it wasn't too bad. . . but if he forgot and moved it in any direction, a series of exploding bolts went off in his neck, shoulders, and upper back. Even the thought of allowing his head to roll backward was unbearable.

He walked slowly to the rear of the van, running his hand lightly over the dented, paint-peeled surface, hearing and feeling the glass as it crunched under his feet. He stood at the far end of the driver's side for a long time. He was afraid to turn the corner. He was afraid that, when he did, he would see the kid squatting on his hunkers, holding the knife in his left hand and grinning that empty grin. But he couldn't just stand here, holding his head on top of his strained neck like a big bottle of nitroglycerine, while it got dark around him, so at last Hogan went around.

Nobody. The kid was really gone. Or so it seemed at first.

The wind gusted, blowing Hogan's hair around his bruised face, then dropped away completely. When it did, he heard a harsh scraping noise coming from about twenty yards beyond the van. He looked in that direction and saw the soles of the kid's sneakers just disappearing over the top of a dry-wash. The sneakers were spread in a limp V. They stopped moving for a moment, as if whatever was hauling the

kid's body needed a few moments' rest to recoup its strength, and then they began to move again in little jerks.

A picture of terrible, unindurable clarity suddenly rose in Hogan's mind. He saw the jumbo Chatterly Teeth standing on their funny orange feet just over the edge of that wash, standing there in spats so cool they made the coolest of the California Raisins look like hicks from Fargo, North Dakota, standing there in the electric purple light which had overspread these empty lands west of Las Vegas. They were clamped shut on a thick wad of the kid's long blonde hair.

The Chatterly Teeth were backing up.

The Chatterly Teeth were dragging Mr. Bryan Adams away to Nowhere, U.S.A.

Hogan turned in the other direction and walked slowly toward the road, holding his nitro head straight and steady on top of his neck. It took him five minutes to negotiate the ditch and another fifteen to flag a ride, but he eventually managed both things. And during that time, he never looked back once.

Nine months later, on a clear hot summer day in June, Bill Hogan happened by Scooter's Grocery & Roadside Zoo again . . . except the place had been renamed. NAN'S PLACE, it now said. GAS COLD BEER VIDEO'S. Below the words was a picture of a wolf — or maybe just a Woof — snarling at the moon. Wolf himself, The Amazing Minnesota Coydog, was lying in a cage in the shade of the porch overhang. His back legs were sprawled extravagantly, and his muzzle was on his paws. He did not get up when Hogan got out of his car to fill the tank. Of the rattlesnakes and the tarantula there was no sign.

"Hi, Woof," he said as he went up the steps, and the cage's inmate rolled over on his back, as if hoping to be scratched.

The store looked bigger and cleaner inside. Hogan guessed this was partly because the sky was clear and the air wasn't full of flying dust, but that wasn't all; the windows had been washed, for one thing. The board walls had been replaced with pine-paneling that still smelled fresh and sappy. A snackbar with five stools had been added at the back. The novelty case was still there, but the cigarette loads, the joy-buzzers, and Dr. Wacky's Itching Powder were gone. The case was filled with videotape boxes. A hand-lettered sign read X-RATED IN BACK ROOM "B 18 OR B GONE."

The woman at the cash register was standing in profile to Hogan, looking down at a calculator and running numbers on it. For a moment Hogan was sure this was Mr. and Mrs. Scooter's daughter — the female complement of those three boys Scooter had talked about raising. Then she raised her head and Hogan

saw it was Mrs. Scooter herself. It was hard to believe this could be the woman whose mammoth bosom had almost burst the seams of her NEVADA IS GOD'S COUNTRY tee-shirt, but it was. Mrs. Scooter had lost at least fifty pounds (most of it in the breastworks, from the look) and dyed her hair a dark walnut brown. Only the sun-wrinkles around the eyes and mouth were the same.

"Getcha gas?" she asked.

"Yep. Fifteen dollars' worth." He handed her a twenty and she rang it up. "Place looks a lot different from the last time I was in."

"Been a lot of changes since Scooter died, all right," she agreed, and pulled a five out of the register. She started to hand it over, really looked at him for the first time, and hesitated. "Say . . . ain't you the guy who almost got killed the day we had that storm last year?"

He nodded and stuck out his hand. "Bill Hogan."

She didn't hesitate; simply reached over the counter and gave his hand a single strong pump. The death of her husband seemed to have improved her disposition . . . or maybe it was just that the waiting for it to happen was over.

"I'm sorry about your husband. He seemed like a nice enough sort."

"Scoot? Yeah, he was a good 'nough fella before he took ill," she agreed. "And what about you? You all recovered?"

Hogan nodded. "I wore a neck-brace for about six weeks — not for the first time, either — but I'm okay."

She was looking at the scar which twisted down his right cheek. "He do that? That kid?"

"Yeah."

"Stuck you pretty bad."

"Yeah."

"I heard he got hurt in the crash, crawled out into the desert, and died." She was looking at him shrewdly. "That about right?"

Hogan smiled a little. "Near enough, I guess."

"J.T. — he's the State Bear around these parts — said the animals worked him over pretty good. Desert rats are awful impolite that way."

"I don't know much about that part."

"J.T. said the kid's own mother wouldn't have rekanized him." She put a hand on her reduced bosom and looked at him earnestly. "If I'm lyin', I'm dyin'."

Hogan laughed out loud. In the weeks and months since the day of the storm, this was something he found himself doing more often. He had come, it sometimes seemed to him, to a slightly different arrangement with life since that day.

"Lucky he didn't kill you," Mrs. Scooter said.

"That's right," Hogan agreed. He looked down

at the video case. "I see you took out the novelties."

"Them old things? You bet! That was the first thing I did after—" Her eyes suddenly widened. "Oh, say! Jeepers! I got somethin' belongs to you! If I was to forget, I reckon Scooter'd come back and haunt me!"

Hogan frowned, puzzled, but the woman was already going back to the grille area. She went behind the counter, stood on tiptoe, and brought something down from a high shelf above the rack of breakfast cereals. She came back and put the Jumbo Chatterbox Teeth down beside the cash register.

Hogan stared at them with a deep sense of *deja vu* . . . but no real surprise. The oversized teeth stood there on their funny orange shoes, cool as a mountain breeze, grinning up at him as if to say, *Hello, there! Did you forget me? I didn't forget YOU, my friend. Not at all.*

"I found em on the porch the next day, after the storm blew itself out," Mrs. Scooter said. She laughed. "Just like old Scoot to give you somethin' for free, then stick it in a bag with a hole in the bottom. I was gonna throw em out, but he said he give em to you, and I should stick em on a shelf someplace. He said a travelling man who came in once'd most likely come in again . . . and here you are."

"Yes," Hogan agreed. "Here I am."

He picked up the teeth and slipped his finger between the slightly gaping jaws. He ran the pad of the finger along the molars at the back, and in his mind he heard the kid, Mr. Bryan Adams from Nowhere, U.S.A., chanting *Bite me! Bite me! Biiiiite me!*

Were the back teeth still streaked with some dull rusty color? Hogan thought they were, but perhaps it was only a shadow.

"I saved it because Scooter said you had a boy."

Hogan nodded. "I do." And, he thought, *the boy still has a father. I'm holding the reason why. The question is, did they walk all the way back here on their little orange feet because this was home . . . or because they somehow knew what Scooter knew? That sooner or later, a travelling man always comes back, like a murderer is supposed to come back to the scene of his crime?*

"Well, if you still want em, they're still yours," she said. For a moment she looked solemn . . . and then she laughed. "Shit, I probably would have throwed em out anyway, except I forgot about em. Course, they're still broken."

Hogan turned the key jutting out of the gum. It went around twice, making little wind-up clicks, then simply turned uselessly in its socket. Broken. Of course they were. And would be until they decided they didn't want to be broken for awhile. And the question wasn't how they had gotten back here, and the question wasn't even *why* — that was simple. They had been waiting for him, for Mr. William I. Hogan.

They had been waiting for the Label Dude.

The question was this: What did they want?

He poked his finger into the white steel grin again and whispered, "Bite me — do you want to?"

The teeth only stood there on their supercool orange feet and grinned.

"They ain't talking, seems like," Mrs. Scooter said.

"No," Hogan said, and suddenly he found himself thinking of the kid. Mr. Bryan Adams, from Nowhere, U.S.A. A lot of kids like him now. A lot of grownups, too, blowing along the highways like tumbleweed, always ready to take your wallet, say *fuck you, sugar*, and run. You could stop picking up hitchhikers (he had), and you could put a burglar alarm system in your home (he'd done that, too), but it was a hard world where planes sometimes fell out of the sky and the crazies were apt to turn up anyplace and there was always room for a little more insurance. He had a wife, after all.

And a son.

He summoned up the memory of the blonde kid's crazy, empty grin, and tried to match it to the one tilted up to him from beside Mrs. Scooter's new NCR register. He didn't think they were the same. Not at all.

He lived in L.A., and he was gone a lot. Someday the blonde kid's spiritual brother might decide to break in, burglar alarm or no burglar alarm — rape the woman, kill the kid, steal whatever wasn't nailed down.

It might be nice if Jack had a set of Jumbo Chatter Teeth sitting on his desk. Just in case something like that happened.

Just in case.

"Thank you for saving them," he said, picking the Chatter Teeth up carefully by the feet. "I think my kid will get a kick out of them even if they are broken."

"Thank Scooter, not me. You want a bag?" She grinned. "I got a plastic one — no holes, guaranteed."

Hogan shook his head and slipped the Chatter Teeth into his sportcoat pocket. "I'll carry them this way," he said, and grinned back at her. "Keep them close to me."

"Suit yourself." As he started for the door, she called after him: "Stop back again! I make a mean cheeseburger!"

"I'll bet you do, and I will," Hogan said. He went out, down the steps, and stood for a moment in the hot desert sunshine, smiling. He felt good — he felt good a lot these days. He had come to think that was just the way to be.

To his left, Woof the Amazing Minnesota Coydog got to his feet, poked his snout through the crisscross of wire on the side of his cage, and barked. In Hogan's pocket, the Chatter Teeth clicked together once. The sound was soft, but Hogan heard it . . . and felt them move. He patted his pocket. "Down, boy," he said softly.

He walked briskly across the yard, climbed behind the wheel of his new Chevrolet Sprint van, and drove away toward Los Angeles. He had promised Lita and Jack he would be home by seven, eight at the latest, and he was a man who liked to keep his promises.

— CD



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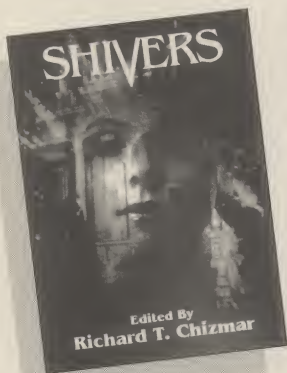
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RAMBLINGS FROM THE DARK #17

On Dennis, Ramsey, Hugh,
And Other Old Farts Of My En-
hanced Age:

So there we were, sometime back in the mist-veiled late 1960s, sitting on a panel at Lunacon in New York City. This was just one of an interminable series of panels that seemed in those days to drift from one convention to another, the persistent title being "New Voices In Science Fiction." Of which I was one, believe it or not. On this panel were myself, Jack Dann, George R.R. Martin, Gardner Dozois, and, alas, someone I can't remember, although it may have been one or both of the Haldemans, Jay and/or Jack. Shortly after the panel ended and we felt we had once again justified our artistic existences to the sf community, and shortly before Ted White took a cream pie in the face (another quaint custom of the day), Gardner turned to us and said, "You know, in twenty-years *we'll* be the Old Farts."

We laughed.

Never happen.

Impossible.

We were young, we were brash, we were confident, we were Surfin' SF Punks riding high and furious on the crest of the New Wave, we had several Nebulas and/or Hugos to our collective credit, and by cracky, we knew it all. Everything except how to get girls, but we were, after all, young

and confident and brash, not to mention stupid.

Twenty five years later (actually, next year, to be historically accurate and in case anybody's interested), I am evidently and officially an Old Fart. That's what the young, brash, confident, award-winners of today's Dark Fantasy tell me, anyway. But since my fiction is no longer science fiction, I don't know how the younger sf writers look at Jack and Gardner and George and the other guy whose name I still can't remember. They're probably Old Farts.

Which makes me wonder then: if I'm an Old Fart, what does that make Hugh Cave? A Fossil Fart? But fossils are frozen slices of skeletal history embedded in rock, and Hugh Cave is still writing. Maybe he's a Volcano Fart—he just hangs around being ancient and rocky and crusty and smoking now and then, until he blows his stack and buries the rest of us in ash. Then he hangs around, crusty and ancient and rocky, and smirking, until he decides to do it again.

And if I'm an Old Fart, then I suppose that makes Dennis Etchison and Ramsey Campbell Old Farts too. Not bad company to be Old Farted with, I suppose, but both of them have been writing longer than I have, so does that make me a young Old Fart, Dennis a middle age Old Fart, and Ramsey an Old Fart with pretensions of

Volcano Fartdom?

And what about Robert Bloch and Basil Copper? Are they Volcano Farts too? You want to tell them that to their face?

Maybe it has something to do with size. Cave and Bloch and Ramsey are tall, Dennis isn't as tall as I am, and since, to my regret, I've never met Basil Copper but he sounds tall, does Old Fartdom have something to do with height too? If that's true, Brian Lumley is a Volcano Fart as well. He must be; he blows his stack often enough.

It seems to me, then, that we desperately need a definition of "Old Fart" so the younger writers (in either age, writing years, or size) know when they have to stop fighting the Old Farts and become Old Farts themselves so they can begin defending themselves against the younger writers who have started calling them, perhaps in grievous error, Old Farts.

You may, at first or third glance, believe this is a frivolous activity here, but when you're someone like fellow columnist Thomas F. (for "Old Fart"? Montelone who resorts to blow dryers and mousse to hide the bald spots, I think you see the urgency. Or, failing that, you may think that since I have, only two days ago, reached the 50-year anniversary of my natal whatever the hell it's called, I am feeling particularly nostalgic for my youth (which you

wouldn't feel if you had the youth I had), that long ago time when I wasn't an Old Fart, and Old Fartdom was not, I assure you, something I aspired to.

Not true.

This is a serious discussion here, since the Old Fartdom controversy has, in several instances over the past couple of years, rent the fragile fantastic fabric of our writing community and wrought much hard feeling between certain writers of one nature or another. Mostly another. Such a rent, and too damn high it is too for my current level of income, must needs be healed, or, at the very least, shrunk a little as soon as possible. Divisiveness in any profession is, by definition, dumb. It may be fun once in while, don't get me wrong, but it's still dumb.

So.

Try one of these on for size, unless, of course, you're on a diet, in which case you can just hold them up in front of you to see if they might fit were you to wear one were you the size you want to be when you finally stop killing yourself and get back to eating normally.

An Old Fart is:

1. Someone who has been around too long for his own good and ought to stop writing and start collecting social security (since financial security is out of the question). This person is out of touch with contemporary morays (slippery as they are anyway even for the young and swift), has no appreciation of contemporary style, and wouldn't know Anthrax from anthrax if a cow bit him on the ass;

Or:

2. Someone who has become unconscionably hidebound in his belief that the only good writing is done by someone with youthful energy and a sharp eye for the contemporary scene finely honed by experience and wisdom due to the youth and experience finely honed

by the non-Old Fart. This person is cranky, bitchy, sarcastic, snide, unwilling to face the fact that he's being eclipsed by another generation, and probably thinks Bob Newhart is the funniest damn comedian ever to walk the face of the Earth. He figures Andrew Dice Clay is about because he doesn't understand what the fuss is all about because he can't find his reading glasses and his wife is busy playing Mah-Jong with the ladies of the Old Fart Auxiliary down in St. Petersburg or Tampa. This person hasn't written a coherent sentence in 40 years and simply doesn't understand why the hell nobody calls him anymore for his opinion of the current state of horror fiction.

Or:

3. Someone who hasn't the slightest idea what this column is about because he doesn't understand what the fuss is all about because he can't find his reading glasses and his wife is busy playing Mah-Jong with the ladies of the Old Fart Auxiliary down in St. Petersburg or Tampa. This person hasn't written a coherent sentence in 40 years and simply doesn't understand why the hell nobody calls him anymore for his opinion of the current state of horror fiction.

Or:

4. Someone who has been around for quite a while and, during that quite a while, has come to the conclusion that "Old Fart" is a state of mind of the young, not the old (as in length of time in business, not age or height). He understands fully the yelling and the confidence and brashness and urgency felt by the Old-Fart-Slingers because he still, despite the slow deterioration of his brain cells due to all that futile girl-chasing in his younger days, remembers what it was like when he himself took aim at the Old Farts and grinned wolfishly at what he believed were palpable hits. He also understands that, since he is older and slowly sinking into the quagmire, he does not now and never did know everything, that there are valuable lessons to be learned from those who are hot on his heels, and that some of those who are indeed hot on his heels will no doubt overtake and

surpass him because, in the end, that's what it's all about. Tolerance, however, for the Old-Fart-Callers is not one of his primary characteristics. After all, being testy is one of the earned privileges of those who have already gone through the fire and come out their eyebrows intact.

No doubt there are other definitions of Old Fartdom (including, I suppose, this column in its entirety), but I think the above will suffice for the nonce (that's an Old Fart phrase meaning "it'll do"; Old Farts use stuff like that). And no doubt there are some official Old Farts whose names I've failed to mention. Be not offended. We Old Farts have limited immediate recall capacity, as you know, and it's difficult enough remembering my age and address, much less remembering the rest of you.

I caution you, however, not to take this column as an appeal to healing the rents and rifts that appear in our midst from time to time. After all, if there wasn't any Old-Fart-Baiting, we Old Farts wouldn't be able to demonstrate our clear superiority, and the young guys wouldn't have anything to do with their spare time but write, and what fun is that, I ask you?

Also, there'd be a very real danger of falling into complacency, and neither of us would ever learn a damn thing.

Therefore, I call for the debates to continue. Always. Let the potshots strike where they may, let the egos bruise as they will, and let the rest of us sit in our rocking chairs or on the porch steps, spit tobacco into the daisies, and trade war stories about editors, publishers, and the real enemy—illiteracy—while we work on our next book or story.

"The rest of us", of course, means the Old Farts.

You Young Farts will just have to earn the privilege.

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GORMANIA

In the past three weeks, six writers have called me to say that they're seriously considering dumping their present agents and getting new ones.

A lot of this talk comes from the recession that has hit the publishing industry. Though paperback sales are up 14 percent so far this year, the number of titles published has been cut back and so selling a book is more difficult than it was a few years ago.

And when your books aren't being bought, you logically enough blame your agent.

Or is that really logical at all?

Let me make it clear that I have no particular wisdom on the subject of agents. But because *Mystery Scene* is used as a kind of information exchange, I do hear a fair number of tales about agents and lately I've started thinking about when and why a writer should seek new representation, a fancy way of saying firing that indifferent, insensitive hack presently peddling our masterpieces, and finding someone who will nourish and nurture us with his love and admiration and awe—i.e., The Perfect Agent.

A few years ago, a friend of

mine decided that he needed to break out of genre mystery fiction by writing a blockbuster crime novel. During the day, he did his genre fiction to pay the bills. At night, he worked on his big book. This went on for fourteen months. When he finished, he sent the manuscript to his agent and waited for the inevitable phone call telling him what a genius he was. That particular call never came.

The one he received went something like this: You've written a book that crosses genres and those books never work and therefore a) this book is not a step forward but a step backward and b) I don't want to embarrass either of us by showing this to any major hardback houses but I will agree to shop it around to some paperback places if you like.

My friend broke off his relationship with the agent on the spot. Pretty clearly, the two had reached an impasse.

After a few weeks of cooling off, my friend found another agent. The book sold first trip out to a major hardcover house. It was taken by two book clubs and snapped up by a very big paperback house for very nice money.

Writers love this story. For one thing, it has a happy ending.

For another, it shows us what dolts agents are.

Or does it?

Another friend of mine, an action-adventure writer, did much the same thing as the writer above, wrote a book on spec that was designed to move him up. He received the same response from his agent. Not a very good book, sorry. But (his agent said) why don't you try another breakout book? Let me see the outline and I'll help you with it.

The action-adventure writer likewise fired his agent. But here is where the similarities end. He sent the book to at least half a dozen prestigious agents, none of whom would agree to represent his novel. He then started sending the book directly to publishers. Several years later, the book goes unsold.

The reason? In my opinion it's not a very good book. It's formula action-adventure with maybe a dozen sub-plots added. It is not bigger in scope, theme or writerly ambition. And worst of all, it dilutes the writer's real strengths, which are pace and character done in broad and colorful brushstroke. All his skills sink beneath the weight of the mechanical sub-plots.

To this day, he blames that

original agent for turning the book down. He's hinted that the man later got him blackballed somehow in the industry. He has returned to action-adventure a bitter man. Rather than try a bigger book again, he's content to rail against anybody who has the audacity to be more successful than he.

Oh, yes, and he markets all his own work. He despises agents.

I know a woman who changed agents and received \$25,000 more for her very next book. I know a man who changed agents at the peak of his run and was inexplicably unable to sell a book for the next two years. I know another man who changed agents and immediately started getting movie sales. I know a woman who changed agents and, over the next few years, found the publisher doing less and less for her—because her agent had alienated her editor.

And on and on to such considerations as—is it better to be the big star of a small agency because you get more attention; or one of many clients at a big agency because of its power? Should you even consider an agent who

doesn't office out of New York City? And (inevitably) if my pal Charlie got \$50,000 for his last book, why can't I get \$50,000 for my new one?

I said I don't have any wisdom on the subject of agents but I'm not sure anybody does. We're probably talking trial-and-error here.

So when should you start looking for an agent? Well, there are certain signs, I think, that an agent is not doing his job.

If you and your agent have profoundly different notions about the kind of books you should be writing. If he does not return your phone calls and/or read your manuscripts in a reasonable amount of time. If he lets your manuscript sit for an undue amount of time on an editor's desk. If he does not fight for significant author benefits in a contract—you keep all movie/tv rights, a good share of the foreign, and generally keeps moving you up in the industry. (Too many agents basically sign whatever the publisher sends them.) Or if he doesn't have some plan for your overall career.

But never forget that agents are known to dump clients, too, and with equally good reason.

When I ran my own ad agency, I learned that the smaller the client, the more demands he made. I dropped many of them because I learned how to make more profit on four large clients than twenty small ones . . . and with much less headache.

Being an agent is a high stress job. He has two bosses, you and the editor, and he must please both. In order to make a living, he must make do with a minimal staff, or no staff at all. If he is a good agent, then he organizes his days and weeks so as to give a fair measure of service to each client. And he is under siege. Just think about how many calls your agent must take and return in a given day; all

the contracts he must examine; all the decisions he must make.

So if you pester him with a lot of unnecessary phone calls; or you think he should get back to you in twenty-four hours on that new book of yours; or you're pissed because he got Buddy \$30,000 when he only got you \$15,000; or you wish he was more of a pal and made sure to call you on your birthday and remember the date of your oldest boy's Bar Mitzvah—well, just as there are bad agents, so too are there bad clients.

This is something that most writers don't like to face. Unfortunately, it's true. Most of us can, at least on occasion, be less than wonderful to deal with (yes, even me)—whining, threatening, sulking—none of which is pleasant to deal with, especially on a day when five or six of your agent's clients treat him to this particular routine.

For most of us, changing agents is a trauma akin to divorcing our mates. Sure, there are writers who have four or five agents in a ten-year period, but the majority of us are sensible enough to know that, as with any relationship, there will always be high points when your agent seems to be the best friend you've ever had—and other low points where he seems, if not exactly an enemy, certainly not somebody who cares much about you or your well-being.

With recession slashing the number of books being published, more and more writers are looking for the supposed quick-fix of getting a new agent.

All I can say is proceed with caution and at least consider this possibility: just as he is not the perfect agent, you may not be the perfect client. Maybe all you need is a good heart-to-heart with the man or woman representing you.

And, oh yes—good luck. And may the gods smile upon your decision, whatever it may be.



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PRISONERS and other stories

by ED GORMAN

Afterword by Dean R. Koontz

"A DISTINGUISHED COLLECTION"

—ELLERY QUEEN

The British magazine *Million*, devoted to the serious study of popular fiction, recently reviewed Ed Gorman's first short story collection, *PRISONERS*. Here's an excerpt from that review:

"Ed Gorman is one of that magically inventive breed of writers who concentrates on his characters...and in the slow unfolding of their lives, Gorman has them take on the three-dimensional to an extent which is superior to almost everyone else.

"Gorman writes everything: crime, suspense, westerns, horror, private eye...you name it. But while it's a creditable and even enviable achievement, his refusal to stick to any one genre could well explain why he's not more widely regarded as being one of the world's great storytellers. Which is a shame, because he is.

"Mark Twain, Erskine Caldwell, August Derleth, Ray Bradbury, Stephen King and, most recently, Richard Ford, all storytellers supreme...your ranks are once again blissfully swelled."

"Gorman is already among the best genre writers, and he keeps getting better. Both his mysteries and his westerns are consistently excellent. He's also an accomplished short story writer...Gorman possesses the rare ability to examine real issues in a fictional setting without preaching."

—BOOKLIST

"As Dean R. Koontz points out in his afterword, Gorman loves and draws upon any number of fictional genres—westerns, horror, mainstream short stories à la Irwin Shaw. Nearly all the stories deal with some form of crime, though many are not amenable to conventional punishment. His favored backgrounds run to the darkside—bars, buses, truck stops, hospitals, prisons—and his characters to disillusioned middle-agers, threatened children, discordant families, though the bleak world view is seldom unalleviated by some gleam of hope for the human species.

This is a distinguished collection."

—ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

"Gorman's sardonic vision, hardbltten style and talent for surprise make him one of the most distinctive voices in today's crime fiction.... This collection shows him at the top of his form."

—Robert Wade of THE SAN DIEGO UNION

"Gorman is the poet of dark suspense...his Midwest is both beautiful and strange, peopled with victims and victimizers who will haunt you."

—THE BLOOMSBURY REVIEW



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JOHNNY HALLOWEEN

NORMAN PARTRIDGE

NORMAN PARTRIDGE has a very bright future ahead of him. In his Introduction to Partridge's short story collection, *Mr. Fox and Other Feral Tales*, writer and critic Ed Bryant noted quite correctly: "Like Elvis, Norm is everywhere." Indeed, his short work has appeared in over a dozen major publications, most notably in *Final Shadows*, *Amazing Stories*, *Dark At Heart*, *The Year's Best Horror and Fantasy*. "Johnny Halloween" is one of Partridge's best!

I should have never been there.

Number one: I was off duty. Number two: even though I'm the sheriff, I believe in letting my people earn their pay. In other words, I don't follow them around with a big roll of toilet paper waiting to wipe their asses for them, even when it comes to murder cases. And number three: I'm a very sound sleeper—generally speaking, you've got a better chance of finding Elvis Presley alive than you've got of waking me between midnight and six.

But it was Halloween, and the kids next door were having a loud party, and I couldn't sleep. Sure, I could have broken up the party, but I didn't. I'm a good neighbor. I like to hear the sound of kids having fun, even if I think the music we listened to back in the fifties was a lot easier on the ears. So I'm not sour on teenagers, like some cops. Probably has something to do with the fact that Helen and I never had any kids of our own.

It just didn't work out for us, is all. When Helen had the abortion, we were young and stupid and we figured we'd have plenty of chances later on. That wasn't the way it worked out, though. I guess timing is everything. The moment passes, things change, and the life you thought you'd have isn't there when you catch up to it.

What it is, is you get older. You change and you don't even notice it. You think you're making the decisions, but mostly life is making them for you. You're just along for the ride. Reacting, not acting. Most of the time you're just trying to make it through

another day.

That's how most cops see it. Like my deputies say: shit happens. And then we come along and clean up the mess.

I guess maybe I do carry around that big roll of toilet paper, after all.

So, anyway, Helen had asked me to get another six-pack and some chips. She does like her Doritos. It was hot, especially for late October, and a few more beers sounded like a good idea. I worry about Helen drinking so much, but it's like the kid thing. We just don't talk about it anymore. What I usually do is drink right along with her, and then I don't feel so bad.

So I was headed up Canyon, fully intending to go to the Ralphs Supermarket on Arroyo, when I observed some suspicious activity at the old liquor store on the corner of Orchard and Canyon (if you want it in *copese*).

Suspicious isn't the word for it. A couple of Mexican girls were coming out of the place. One was balancing a stack of cigarette cartons that was so high she couldn't see over it. The other had a couple of plastic sacks that looked to be filled with liquor bottles.

I pulled into the lot, tires squealing. The girl with the liquor bottles had pretty good instincts, because she dropped them and rabbitied. The strong smell of tequila and rum hit me as I jumped out of the truck—a less sober-hearted man would have thought he'd died and gone to heaven. Me, I had other things on my mind. The girl with the cigarettes hadn't gotten too far. She didn't want to give up her booty. Cartons were slipping and sliding and she looked like a drunken trapeze artist about to take the big dive, but she was holding tough.

Tackling her didn't seem like the best idea, but I sure didn't want to let her work up any steam. I'm not as fast as I used to be. So what I did was I grabbed for her hair, which was long enough to brush her ass when she wasn't running and it wasn't streaming out behind her. I got a good grip first try; her feet went out from under her, she shrieked like a starlet in a horror movie

who's about to taste chainsaw, the smokes went flying every which way, and it was just damn lucky for me that she wasn't wearing a wig.

"It wasn't me!" she said, trying to fight. "I didn't do it! It was some guy wearing a mask!"

"Yeah, right. And you've got a receipt for these cigarettes in your back pocket. Sorry . . . got you red-handed, little miss."

I hustled her across the lot, stomping cigarette cartons as I went. That gave me a kick. God, I hate smokers. We went inside the store, and that's when I saw what she'd meant when she said she hadn't done anything.

The kid was no more than twenty, and—like the old saying goes—he'd never see twenty-one. He lay on the floor, a pool of dark blood around the hole in his head.

"We saw the guy who did it," the girl said, eager to please, *real* eager to get my fingers out of her hair. "He cleaned out the register. He was wearing a mask . . ."

Dead eyes stared up at me. My right boot toed the shore of a sea of blood. Already drying, going from red to a hard black on the yellow linoleum. Going down, the clerk had tripped over a stack of newspapers, and they were scattered everywhere. My face was on the front page of every paper, ten or twenty little faces, most of them splattered with blood.

" . . . a Halloween mask," she continued. "A pumpkin with a big black grin. We weren't with him. We pulled in after it was over, but we saw him leaving. I think he was driving an El Camino. It was silver, and it had those tires that have the chrome spokes. We were gonna call you before we left, honest. We figured the clerk was already dead, and that we'd just take what we wanted and—"

"Let it lay." I finished it for her, and she had the common decency to keep her mouth shut.

I just stood there for a minute, looking at the dead kid. It was like looking at myself thirty years ago. Like that poem about roads not taken. I almost envied him. Then I couldn't see him anymore—I saw myself at eighteen, so I looked away.

At the papers, at my smiling face.

At the headline: HERO RESCUES BABY FROM WELL.

Some hero. A grinning idiot with blood on his face.

The Mexican girl couldn't wait anymore. She'd run out of common decency and was starting to worry about herself again.

She opened her mouth.

I slapped her before she could say anything stupid.

My fingers striking hard against her tattooed

tears.

"The other girl got away," I said. "I'll bet she had the gun. Long black hair, about five-six, maybe a hundred pounds. Maybe a little more . . . it's hard to tell with those baggy jackets they wear. Anyway, she probably tossed the weapon. We'll beat the bushes on Orchard. That can wait until tomorrow, though."

Kat Gonzalez nodded, scribbling furiously. She was one of ten deputies who worked under me, and she was the best of the lot.

"I'm leaving this in your hands, Kat. I mean to tell you, I'm all out." I wanted to take a six-pack from the cooler, but I resisted the temptation. "I'm going home."

Kat stopped me with a hand on my shoulder. "Sheriff . . . Hell, Dutch, I know what happened here when you were a kid. This must feel pretty weird. But don't let it eat at you. Don't—"

I waved her off before she could get started. "I know."

"If you need to talk—"

"Thanks." I said it with my back to her, and the only reason it came out okay was that I was already out the door.

I stomped a few more cigarette cartons getting to my truck, but it didn't make me feel any better. The night air was still heavy with the aroma of tequila and rum, only now it was mixed with other less appealing parking lot odors.

Burnt motor oil. Dirt. Piss.

Even so, it didn't smell bad, and that didn't do me any good.

Because it made me want something a hell of a lot stronger than beer.

I drove to Ralphs and bought the biggest bottle of tequila they had.

I was eighteen years old when I shot my first man.

Well, he wasn't a man, exactly. He was seventeen. And he was my brother.

Willie died on Halloween night in 1959. He was wearing a rubber skull mask that glowed in the dark, and "Endless Sleep" was playing on the radio when I shot him. He'd shown up at the store on the corner of Canyon and Orchard—it was a little mom-and-pop joint back then. With him was another boy, Johnny Halowenski, also wearing a mask.

A pumpkin face with a big black grin.

They showed up on that warm night in 1959 wanting money. The store had been robbed three times in the last two months, each time during my shift. The boss had said I'd lose my job if it happened again.

I'd hidden my dad's .38 under the counter, and the two bandits didn't know about it.

Skullface asked for the money. I shot him instead. I didn't kill him, though. Not at first. He had enough spit left in him to come over the counter after me. I had to shoot him two more times before he dropped.

By then Pumpkinface had gotten away. I came out of the store just in time to see his Chevy burning rubber down Orchard, heading for the outskirts of town. There wasn't any question about who he was. No question at all. I got off a couple more shots, but none of them were lucky.

I went inside and peeled off the dead bandit's skull mask. I sat there stroking my brother's hair, hating myself, crying.

Then I got myself together and called the sheriff's office.

When the deputies arrived, I told them about Johnny Halowenski. I didn't know what else to do. They recognized the name. L.A. juvie had warned them about him. Johnny had steered clear of trouble since moving to our town, and the deputies had been willing to go along with that and give him a break.

But trouble had caught up with Johnny Halowenski in a big way.

I knew that, and I laid it on. My dad had been a deputy before he got too friendly with the whiskey bottle, and I knew it was important to get things right, to make sure that Halowenski wouldn't be able to get away with anything if the cops caught up to him.

I told the deputies that Halowenski was armed and dangerous.

I told the deputies that Halowenski took off his mask when he got in the Chevy, that there could be no mistake about his identity.

Everything I said ended up in the papers. There were headlines from Los Angeles to San Francisco about the Halloween murder/robbery at a liquor store near the border and the ensuing manhunt.

One paper mentioned that the suspect's nickname was Johnny Halloween. After that I never saw it any other way. Almost every year I'd see it a few times. On FBI wanted posters. In cheap magazines that ran stories about unsolved crimes. And, on Halloween, I could always count on it turning up in the local papers.

Johnny Halloween. I leaned back against my brother's granite tombstone and stared up at the night sky, trying to pick out the name in the bright stars above.

Drinking tequila, thinking how I'd never seen that name where I wanted to.

On a tombstone.



I knew he'd show up sooner or later, because we always met in the cemetery after the robberies.

Johnny came across the grass slow and easy, his pistol tucked under his belt, like the last thing in the world he wanted to do was startle me. I tossed him the bottle when he got near enough. "Let's drink it down to the worm," I said.

He didn't take a drink, though. He would have had to lift his mask, and he didn't seem to want to do that, either.

"Miss me?" he asked, laughing, and his laughter was bottled up inside the mask, like it couldn't quite find its way out of him.

"It's been a while," I said. "But not long enough to suit me."

He tossed me a thin bundle of bills. "Here's your cut. It's the usual third. I don't figure you've still got my dough from the last job. If I could collect interest on it, it might amount to something."

I didn't say anything to that. I didn't want to rise to the bait.

"Well, hell . . . it's good to see you too, Dutch. The old town hasn't changed all that much in thirty years. I went by my daddy's house, and damned if he isn't still driving that same old truck. Babyshit brown Ford with tires just as bald as he is. Seventy-five years old and still drives like a bat out of hell, I'll bet. How about your daddy? He still alive?"

I pointed two graves over.

"Yeah, well . . . I bet you didn't shed too many tears. The way he used to beat hell out of you and Willie, I'm here to tell you. Man could have earned money, throwin' punches like those—"

That hit a nerve. "Just why are you here, Johnny?"

Again, the bottled-up laugh. "Johnny? Hell, that's a kid's name, Dutch. Nobody's called me that in twenty-five years. These days I go by Jack."

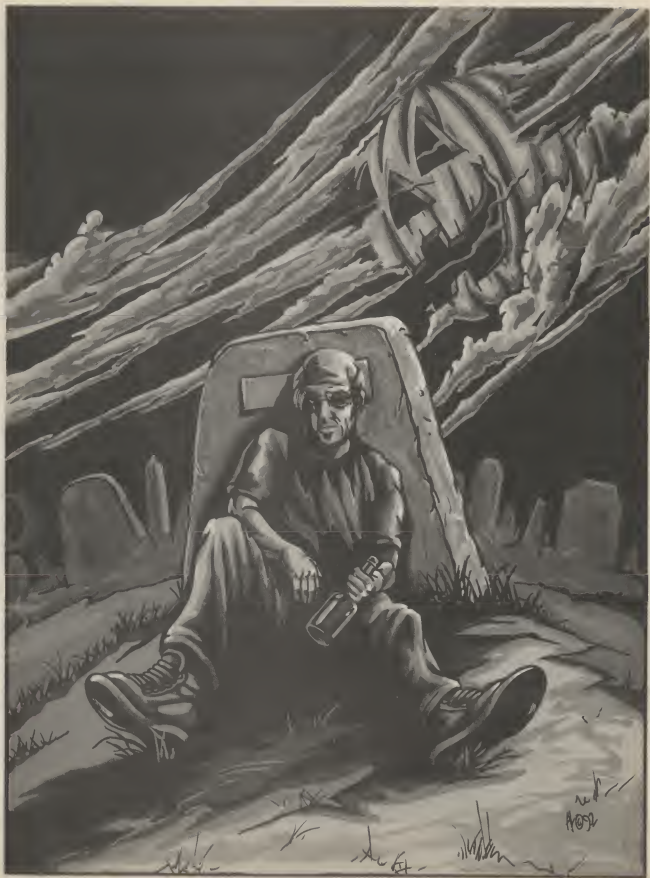
"Okay, Jack. I'll stick with the same question, though."

"Man, you're still one cold-hearted son of a bitch. And I thought you'd gone and mellowed. Become a humanitarian. Do you know that your picture made the Mexico City dailies? Sheriff rescues baby from well. That took some kind of big brass *cajones*, I bet."

My face had gone red, and I didn't like it. "There wasn't anything to it," I said. "I found the baby. I'm the sheriff. What was I supposed to do?"

We were both quiet for a moment.

"Look, Johnny—Jack—I'm tired. I don't mind telling you that the years have worn on me, and I don't have much patience anymore. Why don't you start by giving me your gun. I'm going to need it for evidence. I've already got one suspect in custody—nobody will ever connect what happened tonight to you. So you can figure you got your revenge, and you can tell me



how much money you want, and we can get on with our lives."

"You know," he said, "I hadn't thought about you for years and years. And then I saw that picture in the paper, and damned if I wasn't surprised that you'd actually gone and become a cop. Man oh man, that idea took some getting used to. So I said to myself, *Jack, now you've just got to go see old Dutch before you die, don't you?*"

He knelt before me, his blue eyes floating in the black triangles of that orange mask. "See, I wanted to thank you," he said. "Going to Mexico was the best thing that ever happened to me. I made some money down there. Had a ball. They got lots of pretty boys down there, and I like 'em young and dark. Slim, too—you know, before all those frijoles and tortillas catch up to 'em. You never knew that about me, did you, Dutch? Your brother did, you know. I had a real hard-on for his young ass, but he only liked pussy. You remember how he liked his pussy? Man, how he used to talk about it. Non-fucking-stop! Truth be told, I think he maybe liked the talkin' better than the doin'. And you so shy and all. Now that was funny. You two

takin' your squirts under the same skirt."

"You got a point in here somewhere, or are you just trying to piss me off?"

"Yeah. I got a point, Dutch."

Johnny Halloween took off the pumpkin mask, and suddenly I had the crazy idea that he was wearing Willie's skull mask beneath it. His blue eyes were the same and his wild grin was the same, but the rest of his face was stripped down, as if someone had sucked all the juice out of him.

"It's what you get when you play rough with pretty boys and don't bother to wear a raincoat," he said. "AIDS. The doctors say it ain't even bad yet. I don't want it to get bad, y'see."

I stared at him. I couldn't even blink.

He gave me the gun. "You ready to use it now?"

I shook my head. "I'm sorry," I said, and I was surprised to find that I really meant it.

"Let me help you out, Dutch." That wild grin welded on Death's own face. "See, there's a reason it took me so long to get here. I had to swing past your place and talk to Helen. Did a little trick-or-treating and got me some Snickers. Nothing more, nothing

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less. And when I'd had my fill, I told her everything."

There was nothing I could say . . .

"Now, I want you to do it right the first time, Dutch. Don't drag it out."

. . . so I obliged him.

It took two hours to get things done. First I heaved up as much tequila as I could. Then I drove ten miles into the desert and dumped Johnny Halloween's corpse. Next I headed back to the cemetery, got in Johnny's El Camino, and drove two miles north to a highway rest stop. There were four or five illegals standing around who looked like they had no place to go and no way to get there. I left the windows down and the keys in the ignition and I walked back to the cemetery, hoping for the best.

On the way home, I swung down Orchard and tossed Johnny's pistol into some oleander bushes three houses up from the liquor store.

My house was quiet. The lights were out. That was fine with me. I found Helen in the kitchen and untied her. I left the tape over her mouth until I said my piece.

I didn't get through the whole thing, though. Toward the end I ran out of steam. I told her that Johnny and Willie and me had pulled the robberies because we hated being so damn poor. That it seemed easier to take the money than not to take it, with me being the clerk and such a good liar besides. I explained that the Halloween job was going to be my last. That I'd been saving those little scraps of money so we could elope, so our baby wouldn't have to come into the world a bastard.

It hurt me, saying that word. I never have liked it. Just saying it in front of Helen is what made me start to crack.

My voice trembled with rage and I couldn't control it anymore. "Johnny took me over to his house that day," I said. "All the time laughing through that wild grin. He had me peek in the window . . . and I saw Willie on top of you. . . and I saw you smiling. . ."

I slapped Helen then, just the way I'd slapped the Mexican girl at the liquor store, like she didn't mean anything to me at all.

"I was crazy." I clenched my fists, fighting for control. "You know how I get . . . Everything happened too damn fast. They came to the store that night, and I was still boiling. I planned to kill them both and say I hadn't known it was them because of the masks, but it didn't work out that way. Sure, I shot Willie. But I had to shoot him three times before he died. I wanted to kill Johnny, too, but he got away. So I changed the story I'd planned. I hid Willie's skull mask, and I hid the gun and the money, and I said that

Willie had been visiting me at the store when a lone bandit came in. That bandit was Johnny Halloween, and he'd done the shooting. And all the time that I was lying, I was praying that the cops wouldn't catch him."

I blew my nose, got control of myself. Helen's eyes were wide in the dark, and there was a welt on her cheek, and she wasn't moving. "I was young, Helen," I told her. "I didn't know what to do. It didn't seem right—getting married, bringing a baby into the world when I couldn't be sure that I was the father. I wanted everything to be just right, you know? It seemed like a good idea to use the money for an abortion instead of a wedding. I figured we'd just go down to Mexico, get things taken care of. I figured we'd have plenty of time for kids later on."

That's when I ran out of words. I took the tape off of Helen's mouth, but she didn't say anything. She just sat there.

I hadn't said so much to Helen in years.

I handed her the tequila bottle. There was a lot left in it.

Her hands shook as she took it. The clear, clean liquor swirled. The worm did a little dance. I turned away and quit the room, but not fast enough to miss the gentle slosh as she tipped back the bottle.

I knew that worm didn't stand a chance.

I don't know why I went out to the garage. I had to go somewhere, and I guess that's where a lot of men go when they want to be alone.

I shuffled some stuff around in my toolbox. Cleaned up the workbench. Changed the oil in the truck. Knowing that I should get rid of the pumpkin mask, but just puttering around instead.

All the time thinking. Questions spinning around in my head.

Wondering if Helen would talk.

Wondering if I'd really be able to pin the clerk's murder on the Mexican girls. Not only if the charges would stick, but if I had enough left in me to go through with it.

Wondering if my deputies would find Johnny's corpse, or his El Camino, or if he'd left any other surprises for me that I didn't know about.

They were the kind of questions that had been eating at me for thirty years, and I was full up with them.

My breaths were coming hard and fast. I leaned against the workbench, staring down at the pumpkin mask. Didn't even know I was crying until my tears fell on oily rubber.

It took me a while to settle down.

I got a .45 out of my toolchest. The silencer was



in another drawer. I cleaned the gun, loaded it, and attached the silencer.

I stared at the door that led to the kitchen, and Helen. Those same old questions started spinning again. I closed my eyes and shut them out.

And suddenly I pictured Johnny Halloween down in Mexico, imagined all the fun he'd had over the years with his pretty boys and his money. Not my kind of fun, sure. But it must have been something.

I guess the other guy's life always seems easier. Sometimes I think even Willie's life was easier.

I didn't want to start thinking that way with a gun in my hands.

I opened my eyes.

I unwrapped a Snickers bar, opened the garage door. The air held the sweet night like a sponge. The sky was going from black to purple, and soon it would be blue. The world smelled clean and the streets were empty. The chocolate tasted good.

I unscrewed the silencer. Put it and the gun in the glove compartment along with the three hundred and fifteen bucks Johnny Halloween had stolen from the liquor store.

Covered all of it with the pumpkin mask.

I felt a little better, a little safer, just knowing it was there.

— CD

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TRASH THEATRE

PARENTS

81 minutes.

A Bob Balaban Film

Written by Christopher Hawthorne

Directed by Bob Balaban (Pssst. Here's why they call it a Bob Balaban Film. You see, no one had anything else to do with it, really. A director, see, he's like, well, you know, magic.)

Produced by Bonnie Palef

Starring: Randy Quaid, Marybeth Hunt, Bryan Madosky, Sandy Dennis, Kathryn Brody, and several pounds of raw meat and entrails.

Food is the subject of our column this time.

And child abuse.

You might not think the two go together, but we're going to show you differently, through the sweet metaphor of white collar cannibalism.

You see, we, the USofA are a meat lovin' people. Ain't nothing better than throwing a slab of decaying cow meat on the pit or brewing up a big batch of Tex-Mex Chili, which, by the way, we are doing here at Trash Theater even as we dictate this to our secretary, Bambi.

We should pause for a moment of introduction. Bambi just went to work for us this week. Her prison record and facial tattoos* do not concern us. Her inability to type more than fifteen words per half-hour is unimportant. You see, what she can do, is cook. And she's not very smart, so she works cheap, almost as cheap as Gort, our non-human companion, whose idea of payment is a bag of pork skins.** So, say hello to Bambi. She'll be handling our correspondence from here on out, and if you send anything we consider distasteful, then Bambi will bring her entire three-hundred and forty pounds and her taped axe handle over to your house and will shove said axe handle up that nasty little slot between your ass cheeks about as far as she can get it, and if her prison record is to be believed, she can shove that dude pretty goddamn far. Bless her ole Momma's heart. And ass.

Parents. This one takes place in the fifties, and it's the nightmare version of Beaver Cleaver's neighborhood. In fact, let's make that Beaver Meat Cleaver's neighborhood. It's the Yankee version of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, minus bad teeth and Drayton Sawyer's Rolling Grill and dropped "g"

letters on the ends of words that Yankees waste their time giving "g" letters to.

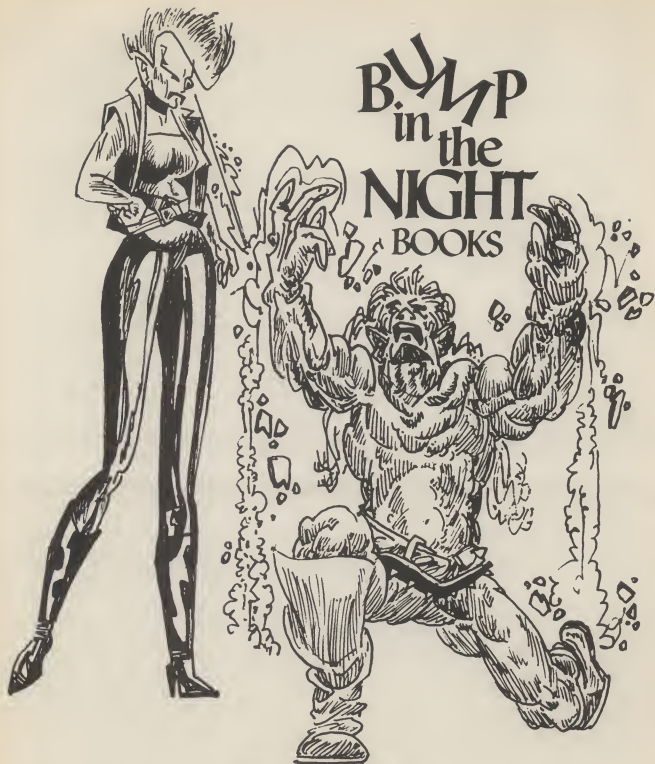
Make a film about the South or Texas, you immediately got to have some retards with chainsaws and enough slobber to fill a mayonnaise jar and a whole bucket of missing "g"s on words, but you got up to Yankee land, well, you got to be careful, cause the nuts don't always look like nuts, and in the case of *Parents*, they're pretty straight lace looking.

Story is about a fine family of three. Mom and Dad and little Mike. They're the kind of family would fit anywhere in any town. The boy is about twelve, subject to chronic nightmares, some triggered by mere adjustments made in his P.J.s, which goes to prove, you got to put your goddamn jammies on right. He has a bad dream, and his Mom explains it away with he hasn't got his jammie shirt on. Wear your jammie shirt, those dreams will clear right up.

Only they don't.

But he's got his Dad to help him deal with the nightmares. He gets scared, Dad knows what to say. The Gestapo and the North Koreans ain't got nothin' on Dad.

Mike, he's scared of the dark, so Dad, very comforting says,



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"Mike, the cellar is dark. Your room is dark. Everything is dark at night. Pretty soon we'll turn off all the lights and it will be dark everywhere."

Then good ole Dad points to his own head and sums it up. "You know, there's one dark place you have to be very careful in. You know where that is? The human mind."

And Dad leaves Mike in the dark, where he dreams of floods of blood and grisly horrors.

The family has just moved from one Yankee place to another, following Dad's job as a chemist to a local plant doing some bang up work on developing powerful defoliants. Dad, he don't give a shit where he works. Fact is, he don't give a shit about anything but prime cuts of meat and the resulting leftovers.

At home, Dad, Mr. Laemie, is the king of his supremely honky castle. His wife, Mrs. Laemie, she knows how to please him. She's a disconnected Betty Crocker, ever the perky homemaker, nose to the cook book. She stands behind her man, no matter how bad he fucks up their son. She's willing to say, "Honey, don't," to Dad when he messes with Mikey's head, but that's about the end of it.

First day in a new school, Mikey's teacher, Miss Baxter, asks the kids to share some new facts with the class. Mikey, he's got a fact. He says: "Take a black cat and boil it in an oven. And you peel off the skin until the bones are cleaned off. And you chew on the bones and you'll be invisible."

Miss Baxter switches the subject, asks Mike if he has a cat or a puppy.

Nope. No puppy or kitty at Mike's house.

Later on, Miss Baxter has the kids do portraits of their family. Mikey draws strange and savage pictures of three monsters completely covered in scribbly red

lines. The teacher she's worried. Not only is this bad artwork, there's something symbolic in all this. She's been to school see, and knows some things. Draw some red lines through monsters, there's some bad shit brewing somewhere.

Mikey gets sent to the social worker, Millie Dew, and they become friends. She's certain Mikey's home life is on the odd side. He has weird views on things. She speculates and Mikey goes home.

Later on, Mikey's dreams get worse, and one night he wakes up thirsty, goes into the kitchen for a drink of water, and finds his parents rolling and fucking on the floor. And we're talking kinky loving too. Nothing so sissy as whipped cream and chocolate, rubber pants, dill pickles, and big rubber dicks with knobs on them. They're rutting around in about twenty-five pounds of human guts.

Dad is pissed. He was getting some pussy. Mom, she tries to gloss things over, tucks a dazed, little Mikey back in bed, Mikey having seen something he cannot explain on any level to anyone.

Mikey's nightmares become more intense, and boy are they visual. Like visions created by Dali while painting with an electric potato*** peeler up his ass.

Mikey follows his Dad to work one day. He creeps around inside the building, discovers a whole batch of bodies. The ones used for tissue experiments. In comes his Dad. Mikey hides under a lab table while his Dad takes out the carving tools and carves some kidneys and loin roast off one of the stiffs. This fits in with Mike's gut reactions that things are weird with Pop. He knows now why he always shunned the meat at the dinner table, why his instincts were against it, and why Dad was so agitated with him, called him the vegetarian in the family, way you'd say "the Ku Kluxer" or the "public mastur-

bater." To Dad, this meat was sacred. A pot roast was like the Sacrament.

Millie Dew, bless her stupid little heart, decides she wants to help Mikey, and she goes over to the Laemie house to snoop around. This is like a serious fuck up. She finds a body in the basement, and Mr. Laemie finds her. Millie, she gets cut, several times.

That night, Millie, she's swimming with the carrots and twims, and Miss Laemie announces proudly at the dinner table to her family, "I trimmed off all the fat."

Things escalate. The boy is a disappointment to his father, who sees him as nothing better than a goddamn carrot gobbler. Dad has finally had enough, and in a rage grabs the kid and threatens him. Mom protests. After all, she kinda likes the boy. Dad, he's not impressed with the protest. He's logical. "It's okay, Lilly, we'll make another, and raise him right!"

We don't want to tell you much more. Some interesting silverware techniques follow, the Laemie house gets warmed up good, there's a film ending connection with the old and good movie, *The Bad Seed*, and the Beave's neighborhood is once again safe for democracy and legitimate pot roast.

Some notes: Great food preparations scenes. Fab looking human meat loaf. (Yea!, pass the ketchup!) And, a real message. That's right, we're gonna say it. This isn't just your regular cannibalism movie. It's a valid metaphor for child abuse. The abused and confused child, tortured not so much physically, or sexually, but emotionally. Good ole Dad always making it unpleasant for him, talking about the dark, wanting him to eat human meat. Mom, turning her back, ignoring what's going on to keep the husband happy, thinking that's the ticket, chirping right along like she really is June Cleaver

(thank goodness no one is).

Parents has its funny moments, but ultimately, it's a disturbing film. Not because it's about cannibalism and has Sandy Dennis in it, but because it touches on real childhood fears. Such as Mom and Dad may not be just exactly right. We highly recommend this. But not to be watched with the kids, or staunch vegetarians. Dogs and cats may not like it either.

Let's wrap with appropriate snacks. Well, almost any meat product would fit right in with this. But, a three weenie sandwich on a white bread bun with mayonnaise and a side of macaroni and cheese seems like the ticket. Oh, and don't forget the big ole tumbler of purple or red Kool-Aid.

Okay, it has to happen. You begged. You pleaded. You insisted. So, here it is.

We're finally going to do it. We're going to talk about, that's right—

The woman.

The sweet potatoes.

The asshole.

You see, there's this woman named Karen Finley, she's like a performance artist or something. She's relevant. She's a feminist, and we got to tell you, we at Trash Theater have been moved by her.

You see, to speak out against the horrible abuse against women, our stupid passion for consumerism, Karen Finley goes bravely where no woman has gone before.

She gets up there on the stage and drops her trousers, and most everything else, and then, right there in front of God and everybody, she shoves canned yams (we prefer to call them sweet taters) up her asshole.

We are not making this up.

If ever a blow has been struck for art, feminism, and anti-consumerism, then Karen has struck it. Or shoved it. Or something.

We were a little confused as to if she does this with the taters still

in the can, or if she takes them out of the can before shoving, so we here at Trash Theater, following in the bold steps of Karen Finley herself, experimented. We found you shove those taters up your asshole while in the can, it hurts.

We finally had to hammer the can to a point on one end, get some forty weight lube oil on the cans, and with one of us holding the salad spoons, the other bending over and Gort or Bambie shoving, we were able to get the whole goddamn can up there. The getting it out was some work, and required a couple sets of salad spoons and a rubber glove and a determined attitude.

We found just taking them out of the can and shoving them up our assholes was a hell of a lot easier, though there is the waste involved. You leave them in the can before you shove them up there, make your statement, you can then wipe the can off, open it up and fix those taters in a casse-

Gregory's reading is compelling, vivid, highly nuanced.
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T.E.D. Klein

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role with baked marshmallows on top.

Anyway, we now understand what Karen was trying to say, and we suggest you do not try this at home. We are, by the way, professionals.

What we think is a crime is the fact that Karen Finley was turned down, get this, turned down, for a National Endowment of the Arts. The goddamn, scum-sucking pigs, the male chauvinist, consumerist assholes. To think they wouldn't want to give this lady money for her art, money to finance her lifestyle so she can go up on stage and stick yams, or even a goddamn watermelon up her ass.

What has happened to our love for the arts?

Have we become so enraptured with AIDS research and help for the homeless, that we don't know a good artistic deal when we see it?

We here at Trash Theater are fucking outraged.

Come on National Endowment. Come around. Give her the grant. Let's get Karen on down to the Piggly-Wiggly so she can get her a couple cans of canned yams and a striped rattlesnake watermelon.

Remember, America is about life and liberty and the arts, and the freedom to publicly shove stuff up your asshole and get paid for it.

In honor of Karen Finley, we here at Trash Theater are instituting the Trash Theater Canned Yam Award. This award will be given whenever we feel like it to those who deserve it.

The envelope please.

The Rue Morgue.

All right. The Rue Morgue recently invited Andrew Vachss as a guest to their bookstore to do a signing, and right before his arrival, printed in their newsletter that they thought his novels pandered to child molesters.

When numerous letters and

phone calls poured in protesting these comments about Mr. Vachss, the Rue Morgue, in their ever fair and vigilant manner, printed excerpts of the letters in their newsletter and then went on to indicate that they had all been engineered by Mr. Vachss, despite the fact the letters came not only from friends and fans, but from colleagues and people Vachss had never heard of.

The Rue Morgue just couldn't accept the truth. They fucked up. They made stupid comments. They were rude to invite someone to a signing and then try and plant a note like that in their newsletter.

People like that, they got to deserve a can of yams up the ass. So, we salute you with our first honorary Trash Theater Canned Yam Award, and no lube oil.

So, Rue Morgue, our best wishes, and up your ass.

FOOTNOTES:

* One, written in Latin, reads: Suck Blood From the Balls of Satan, You Ass Wipe.

** We actually say pig skins, but we like to be polite in mixed company.

*** It should be noted that Lansdale, like Dan Quayle, our erstwhile Vice President, wanted to spell potato with an "e" on the end here. He actually got in an argument with Bambi about it, and Bambi's supposed to be stupid. Even Gort sided with Bambi and Webb on this one. Lansdale and Quayle, they can't spell potato.

On a personal note. Need it be said that our opinions do not necessarily reflect those of Mr. Chizmar, whose hand feeds us, and whose hand we bite in turn.

Next time: Trash Theater Anniversary Office Party! Live! Blow by blow account!

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T. LIAM McDONALD INTERVIEWS RICK HAUTALA

PROFILES IN TERROR

AMERICAN NEO-GOTHIC

"...when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you."

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Dell Abyss motto

"Nietzsche might not have been carried over the brink of the world by his intellectual excesses if he had only held more firmly to the foundations of human existence."

Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*

I was talking to Rick Hautala one night not too long ago when the subject of the Dell Abyss line of horror novels came up. He could quote their motto practically verbatim, as though it was burned into his brain:

It's not about haunted houses or evil children or Indian burial grounds.

"Well, that about sums up my career!" he added pithily.

I had to remind him that if one were to add up the sales of every Abyss book published to date, they would not equal a fraction of the number of Rick Hautala

books sold. That says quite a bit more than some elitist credo. It shows what people want to read.

Rick Hautala, far more than any other modern horror writer—more than even Ramsey Campbell or Charles Grant—is a traditionalist. The field he plows is the same worked over by Charles Brockden Brown and Ann Radcliffe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Of course, this begs the question: is calling something "traditional" a nice way of saying "this is the same old shit"?

Hardly. Each generation has to come to terms with the burden of the past and the issue of influence. As Harold Bloom points out in *The Anxiety of Influence*, this creates all kinds of quandaries. How do we reinvent those stories that we ourselves enjoyed? How do we move into new territory when all the territory has already been explored? In horror, the question boils down to how do we revitalize a class of fiction that seems to have played itself out?

For Hautala, our storytelling roots are set in bedrock.

The Writer as Chevy

Rick Hautala has been publishing for thirteen years now, with ten novels in print including the forthcoming *Blue Lady*. His career has seen million-copy bestsellers and survived a treacherous two-book stint with Warner Books. He is one of the bestselling horror writers in the field today. Yet, oddly enough, he is profiled and interviewed rarely, and reviewed almost never. With each novel selling between a quarter-million and a half-million copies, this is indeed odd. Maybe it's because he's a Zebra writer. Maybe it's because people take him for granted. A critic friend recently called Hautala a "dependable" writer. Dependable. Like a Chevy. Is that good?

It's been good enough to keep his sales strong in a time when pseudo-intellectuals are conducting the post-mortem on horror.

Why?

Because he's dependable, yes; but also because he delivers: people that are real, situations readers can identify with, and frights that lurk in our subconscious, there in



the reptile brain, where our primal instincts flow.



Finns

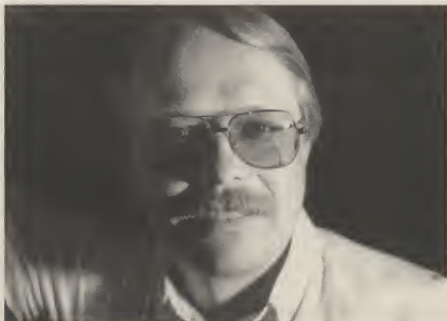
Rick Hautala was born and raised in Rockport Massachusetts, in an area that was almost completely Finnish. "The Swedes on the hill were the racial tension," he recalls. "Our idea of religious integration was the Swedish Lutherans worshipping with the Finnish Lutherans. We didn't know what Jews or Hindus were! If we want to talk cultural stereotypes, the Scandinavians are very stoical and superstitious, so it could be my genetic components that led to this career.

"Growing up I was kind of embarrassed that I was one of the little Finn kids growing up over in the cove. I wanted to be like the Beach Boys. It wasn't until I was in college that I realized what a really neat thing it was to have such an ethnic upbringing, so I played catch up to get back to it. They say that what the first generation wants to forget the second wants to remember."

He describes his upbringing as a typical Norman Rockwell, Ray Bradbury idyllic childhood free of trauma. There were no buried terrors that emerged later and set him on the path of the horror writer. "Whatever minor or major traumas there are in my life are from

my own subconscious and dreams and nightmares. My own imaginings. I didn't even see a dead person until I was in college. I never touched one until a few years ago, and I fully expected blue flames to leap out at me.

"Three of my four grandparents were invalids in the house while I was growing up. My grandmother lived with us three and a half years before she died, and so that explains I'm sure why in almost every one of my novels there's a dying old person just wheezing away. I remember once



describing my grandmother as lying in bed dying by inches, and that image was just horrible to me. It's not so much death that I'm afraid of as much as it's dying. There was an avoidance of that while I was growing up. When one of the grandparents would die in the house my mother would make sure all the kids were out of the house and occupied before she would have someone pick up the body. Maybe these things subconsciously wormed down.

"I always suspected there was a dark side to things. We had a couple of for-real boogeymen in the neighborhood, and I realize

now that these guys were just fisherman who had burned their brains out on alcohol and sterno. My imagination twisted it. I think I was just too benighted or innocent to see the gritty side of things. My mind was the only warped thing in my childhood."

The Hautalas were solidly middle-class workers, with a staunchly practical paternal side of his family balanced by a strong artistic bent on his maternal side. It was the artistic side that he followed, and right up until his senior year in high school, Rick was in-

tending to go to art school to be a graphic artist. "In the same way that I say I'm a writer not an Author, I wanted to be an illustrator not an Artist. What got me to be a compulsive reader was reading

Tarzan of the Apes in seventh grade. I read it in one or two nights and screamed for more. Right about that time the Ace Burroughs editions started coming out with the Frazetta and Roy Krenkle covers. I devoured every book, and had fantasies of being an illustrator like Frazetta or Krenkle.

"I wanted to do science-fiction book covers, right up through senior year. Then I chickened out. I just thought my stuff wasn't good enough. Growing up in Rockport, which used to be an artists colony, I saw these brilliant artists living in shacks, barely surviving. I thought 'I'm not one-tenth as good as these

guys and they're frigging starving!"

When a teacher suggested he major in biology at the University of Maine at Orono, he snapped at the idea. Of course, it wasn't long before he was on the verge of flunking out completely, and when a teacher suggested he switch to an English major, it seemed like the perfect solution: "I just looked at her and said 'You mean I can get a degree just by reading?' I really didn't cop to that. I thought college was a vocational school."

There was another guy living in Rick's dorm in Orono that caught his interest. He, too, was an English major: Stephen King. Even then, Rick recalls, King was a charismatic person. The two became friends, and it was the six-figure sale of *Carrie* that prompted Hautala to try his hand at selling a novel: "I thought 'You mean an English major from Orono did that? Maybe I could do it too. Maybe I could really write and make money.' Steve was the only writer I had ever known. He liked the book [*Moon Death*], sent it around to some publishers, then gave me to his agent, Kirby McCauley. I would not have been published when I was were it not for Steve. Since he was the only writer I knew, when I got the deal for \$2500 from Zebra, I thought 'Is that it? Where's the six figures and the movie deal?' I'm real sensitive about being called 'the other Maine horror writer.' I've never wanted to look like I was coat-tailing on Steve. I don't want to look like I'm taking advantage of him. I consider Steve King a friend. I don't know *what* the phenomena

of 'Stephen King' is."

Hautala got married and went on to do his masters work at Orono. A simple love of Shakespeare led him to pick Renaissance and medieval literature as his area of concentration, and his masters thesis was a tracing of the feminine

archetype through the Margaret of Anjou character in the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*. He taught remedial writing to incoming students and was later fired from a high-school teaching position for being too liberal in class. Through it all, he stayed in Maine, aside from a brief stint in Boston. Why Maine?

"When I first came to Maine as a freshman I hated it. I thought 'Jeez this is backwards. There are people who wear flannel shirts. These guys just got out of the barn and into college.' I got rid of those illusions and realized that it was just a slower

pace of life and people seemed more genuine, a lot less superficial than in the fast-paced life where I grew up. Rockport was a beautiful place to grow up in, but it's been totally yuppieized. Between the upbringing I had, which was very ethnic and pretty rural, and my reading Bradbury in high-school, I got this kind of idea of what

a town should be, and Maine towns are a lot like that. I like the friendliness and the feel of it. Every time I walk to the post office someone

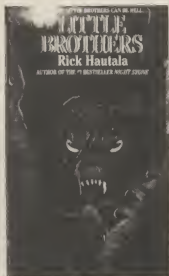
will honk and wave at me. The winters are a bitch, but like they say, if you can't take the winters then you don't deserve the summers. I think all of New England—especially if you're doing traditional stories—is suited to horror. If you're doing punked-out stories you go for New York or LA or New Orleans."

Regionalism is an important factor in Rick Hautala's books. The feel of a place, its legends and history, the subtle changes in personality that are affected by geography, all these things are a strong part of Hautala's writing, giving it added dimension. People do not merely live in a place, they interact with it, and it interacts with them. Each place is unique, and for this reason Hautala is reluctant to write about places where he hasn't lived:

"I really feel like you have to live someplace for quite awhile before you understand it and can feel ... I guess what you could call the spirit of a place. I don't want to write superficial travelogues. I don't want to set a story in LA just because it's hip to set it in LA, having visited it only once or twice. I think you have to live in a place

to get the feelings, to let it work on deeper levels. The first third of *Blue Lady* is set in Omaha, Nebraska, because my brother lives there and I stayed there long enough to get some sense of it. I'm not going to write a novel set in, say, Ireland until I've lived there awhile so I have a good feel for it, because I don't want

to resort to clichés of what Ireland is like. I guess there are writers who can do that, who can make things up and be convincing, but I



feel I really have to be there."



Moonsomething

That first book—*Moon Death*—was a simple werewolf tale, a punchy paperback original that still holds up. In the same way that King showed the vampire story still had some bite left in it with *Salem's Lot*, Hautala gave the werewolf story some wheels for the '80s. *Moon Death* did well, and one would have expected Hautala to continue writing straight-out horror. But the follow-up was *Moon Bog* (the two books are not related), a more psychological tale of a madman loose in a bog. Like the true gothic, a hint of the supernatural is mingled with the realistic and psychological. The mixture isn't wholly effective, and the book is easily his weakest. What is important is that the same interplay of psychological themes and supernatural elements found in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* are also found in *Moon Bog*. *Wieland* is the quintessential American gothic, the seminal novel of America's first professional writer. It has all the ticks, tricks, weaknesses and strengths that mark the gothic. So does *Moon Bog*.

His experience with *Moon Bog*—his least favorite book—has made him dubious of writing that is therapeutic. In dealing with two dysfunctional father-son relationships, he was expressing worries over the birth of his first son. "I just may not have been up to what I was tackling thematically," he says. "I didn't have the chops for it. I may not have the chops for it now. My first kid had been born, and a lot of parental fears—rational and irrational—were expressed in that book. I dealt with two father-son relationships that were really messed up, and a messed up father-son relationship led to a messed up

adult. I was trying to get to that because when my son was born I realized all of a sudden that I had achieved a rite of passage here, but a passage that I might not have merited. Joseph Campbell would have said that I needed some ritual to guide me through it, and our society doesn't provide those rituals. I mean, I'm not going out on a wild man weekend to roll in the mud and beat on a drum, but I understand that need."



Archetypes and Cliches



Night Stone is the novel that put Rick Hautala on the map. A hokey hologrammed child's head/skull slapped on the cover and the prerequisite two word title proved to be a recipe for success: the book went through a half dozen printings and sold a million copies. It also marked a turn for Hautala towards a smoother prose style and a more capable handling of family relationships and the subtly creepy elements that have become a trademark.

Yet here is where some may think we come to all sorts of problems with Rick Hautala and horror as a whole. You see, *Night Stone* is

an Indian burial ground novel, though one mixed with a dose of Finnish folklore. In one short decade the Indian burial ground became as much of a horror cliché as the family curse and crumbling ancestral mansion did to Radcliffe and the other 19th century gothic writers.

And yet, is it truly a cliché? Why do we return to this trope again and again?

The gothic novel is a form, like haiku or iambic pentameter. As such it has requirements, one being a grounding in the past and a deep sense of history. Cynics and Englishmen scoffed at the idea that the gothic could be successfully transplanted to America because America, they would point out, has no history.

But we do. This continent was occupied for ten thousand years before the first white settlements took hold in Newfoundland and later the Caribbean. That's the past, and that is what the gothic can build upon. So, we get the Indian burial ground or Indian lore novel. Is it hackneyed? It's become so in the hands of inept practitioners, but it still has some kick in it, and in *Night Stone* it works like a charm.

Still, it begs the question: why return to the traditional forms?

"There are traditions that have real solid backbones, because they appeal to the basic hardwiring of our brains. One of the scariest things is when you're camping, and you see eyes in the woods, outside the ring of the campfire ... some animal—raccoon, skunk, wolf, who knows? That's one of the scariest primeval images for us: just outside the range of the firelight to know that there's something lurking there. I think that's what good, solid, traditional stories appeal to: these basic, primordial fears. That's where storytelling and horror stories began: with people talking about whose eyes are those. I think traditional storylines or story

images or whatever appeal to those things.

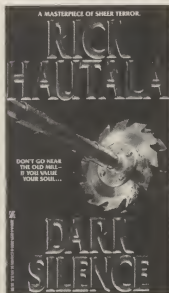
"I really do put a lot of stock in Jung. In college I was exposed to Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung, and it just opened it all up. It tapped into subconscious things that—for me—have always been a little closer to the surface. Ever since I can remember I've paid a lot of attention to my own dreams, and this came from my mother and grandmother. My grandmother kept a dreambook like the one in *Night Stone*. She kept a record of her dreams and was convinced that what they were telling her was pre-cognitive. My mother would ask me every morning, 'Well, what did you dream?' I just learned to pay attention to that stuff. I think between Joseph Campbell and Jung and my own personal experience of having a pretty active dreamlife, it really kind of all fit together. I say 'kind of' because I never really studied it. I just wanted to leave it to intuition and the subconscious. I don't like to intellectualize too much because I think it takes the life out of things.

"One of the things I take offense to is when critics or readers or other writers start looking at traditional stories as clichés. I'll be the first to admit that there are clichés within the field, absolutely. But I think in throwing it all away, they're throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Just because it's traditional or it's been done before, doesn't mean it can't be reworked. The best example I have from my graduate studies is Shakespeare. He was rewriting plays and ripping off other sources for his plays. He didn't think up all those stories, but the way he retold them made it art. He mixed things in an original way, like *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which incorporates many different sources. But it was the way he told the tale that made it a masterpiece. Yes, there are clichés. But we don't have to throw everything out to be

new and exciting and 'cutting edge.'

"I don't like to point fingers, but if we're talking about clichés, the punked-out, alienated youth being vampires seems to me one of clichés that definitely needs some reworking. But if I go back and reread *Dracula*, it still works. I think that's the difference between an archetype and a cliché. Archetypes will be used all the time because they're powerful. A cliché is a lot more culturally bound."

The difference is a fine one but crucial nonetheless. While a



cliché is something imbedded in a particular time, an archetype is readapted for each society and generation. The gothic certainly taps into the fear we have of the past and the decay of the foundations laid by our ancestors. The gothic also taps into the fuzzy border where the rational mind has to determine where the natural ends and the supernatural begins. Each new Rick Hautala book seems to blur that boundary a little further, making it a little less distinguishable. Nowhere is this more obvious than in his latest, *Dark Silence*. There certainly seem to be restless spirits in the book, but then, who is perceiving them? A madman, a heavily medicated woman, and

people in a hypnagogic or dream state: people at the borders of consciousness, perception, and reality. Putting the question to Hautala offers no clear answer:

"If you're going to have something that's subjective and eerie and subconsciously driven, then to offer a pat, logical explanation removes all the suggestive power of what's going on. While I was writing *Dark Silence* I kept asking myself, 'Are the ghosts of these people really there?' If you ask me that right now, I'd say I don't know. People who are in altered states of consciousness can pick up on it. You can't nail down those states."



Why Horror?

"My books probably will always, to some degree, have elements that will be considered horror. That's what happens when you're dealing with the subconscious. I don't want to do international espionage novels. I don't feel any drive to because I think that's a lot more superficial. It seems to me that good fiction, whether you call it horror fiction or not, has to be something that gets down there and tickles the subconscious. It stirs up the muck. It has to hit the reader on that deep level. I don't want people who read my books to get the urge to regurgitate. There might be some scenes that do that to a reader, but what I really want to do is stir up that muck in the subconscious so that days, weeks, or months later an image will rear up again and something from the book will get 'em and make 'em shiver in a deep way.

"I'm a horror writer, but it's a tough thing to say because when you say that people immediately cast you into the genre with the books with the skulls on the cover. They have a pretty narrow definition. I'm as much a horror writer

as Hawthorne or Dickens or Shakespeare was. If you took the folklore and superstition and supernatural out Shakespeare, you'd be left with a shell of a play. To me that's what gives a lot of his work resonance: the supernatural and the folklore.

"I think all horror writers are dealing with the most basic archetype—the fear of death—in some form. I noticed that King now has an ad for The Comedy Channel and his last line is 'Hey, we're all going to die, I'm just trying to make it a little more interesting.' Fuckin' Al! Right on. That's what we're here for. There is that basic fear underlying all horror fiction that appeals to the fear of death, the fear of dying. An analyst would have a field day analyzing my hang-ups and screw-ups on the basis of my work. The time I was most aware of doing that was *Moon Bog*, my least successful book.

"I always paid attention to dreams, and not all those dreams are pleasant ones. I've always had a fascination with the macabre, in the true meaning of the word. Not just Vincent Price and B-movies, but the plague and the Dance of Death and the grim reaper and all that real grotesque stuff, like when Hamlet picks up Yorick's skull and addresses it. The Mel Gibson *Hamlet* really caught that scene: he's talking to a moldering, stinking skull with clumps of earth sticking to it. That just fascinates me. The grave digger scenes in *Hamlet* are my favorite pieces of literature. It's just a macabre fascination. It ties into my interest in the superstition and folklore of renaissance and medieval literature, whereas some of the more modern horror writers (and—get this—I'm gonna call Poe a 'modern' horror writer!) I found much too purple, and they didn't appeal to me as much.

"One of the counselors in summer camp every night would read us an Alfred Hitchcock an-

thology story. Then I'd go out and buy the book and read the rest of them. Science-fiction, fantasy and horror were under one umbrella back in the 50s and 60s. Bradbury and Sturgeon were all published as science fiction. When I finally read Silverberg's *Dying Inside* I thought, Christ, this is no more science-fiction than a Stephen King novel. It really shows how bogus the classifications of horror are. I'm convinced now—after working eight years in a book store—that the only reason we have genres is so that the clerks who don't read know where to put the books."



The Titles That Weren't

Moon Death—The Dark Brother

Moon Bog—Holland Bog
Night Stone—The Menhur
Moon Walker—The Siege
Winter Wake—Lost Souls
Cold Whisper—The Haamu
Dark Silence—Ruins



Monsters?

Yes, Rick Hautala is a horror writer. Even as his books more and more seem to straddle the line between the psychological and the supernatural, he is still a horror writer, the American neo-gothic master of the paperback original. Psychological horror—some of which is being dubbed dark suspense—is certainly not new. It's first practitioners were those same gothic Victorians who gave us *Melmoth the Wanderer* and *The Castle of Otranto* and *Carmilla*. Am I going mad, being driven mad, or being haunted? their characters would ask.

In *Dead Voices*, *Cold Whisper*, *Winter Wake* and *Dark Silence*, the characters ask the same questions. Are these ghosts there, and if they

are, what are they saying to me?

Hautala has also ventured beyond the ghost story to deliver a pair of monster books *Little Brothers* and *Moonwalker* (not to be confused with Michael Jackson's autobiography, though the similarities are striking). The unticgahunk ("little brothers") gnaw their way through one novel and a series of stories like Tasmanian devils on acid, while *Moonwalker* (Hautala's homage to *Night of the Living Dead*) offers a Maine complete with rampaging zombies. While these out-and-out monster books deliver, Hautala's editors keep steering him towards other ground:

"Maybe it's time to do another rip-snorting monster book," he says, "but every editor I've had wants me to keep doing ghost stories. But ghosts are pretty limited in what they can do: they either came back for revenge or to warn someone. They don't come back to floss their teeth. If I can make it a psychological aberration or subjective experience, then I can make it operate in the context of a bigger story. And at least the Little Brothers live on in the stories."

The Little Brothers will also get a second life in a series of comics from Dark Horse, done in collaboration with Steve Bissette and Michael Zulli.

But beyond that, there are no monsters on Rick Hautala's horizon. *Blue Lady* deals with a kidnapping and cross-country chase, and *The Wild Man*, the book after *Blue Lady*, will also be monster-free but not spirit free.



The Tao, The Te, and The Old Farts

The last time Hautala went into the hospital and had to list a religion he put down "Taoist." While his wife Bonnie is active in the Lutheran church and the kids go to Sunday school, he simply

"doesn't buy orthodox Christianity. Still, I consider myself a very religious person, in either a very eastern sense, or a very unorthodox sense. I have religious sentiments and feelings, but they always come when I'm alone, either meditating or in the woods at midnight. Straight, western style religion doesn't appeal to me. I've never found a religion that had precepts that actually speak to the feelings I have. I'm definitely drawn to magical, mystical, subjective, dreamlike things. I do think that there is in some way some higher state beyond the physical, but I don't know how tangible and real it is. I'm not like the Australian aborigine who believes that the dream state is a reality. No, it's just your crazy thoughts, your neurons firing away.

"I leave it open to the possibility that there's genetic, racial memory, which is why I'm attracted to Maine, and winter and pine trees at sunset. It speaks to my Finnish blood. It could just be things I've filled my head with since I was born, but it could be a genetic imprint. If it's subconscious, that's where I want to leave it. I'll just respond to it. I'm not going to figure it all out, because that takes away the power of it. If a little kid wants to figure out how a frog hops, he cuts it open and pulls it apart, and, by Jesus, it don't hop no more. That's why I'm leery a lot of times about intellectualizing about my work. I don't want to fuck with it.

"I'm leery about even talking about it because I don't want to come across as this airhead mystical fool. Taoism comes the closest

for me. Without going out your door you can know the ways of heaven. It's all inside you. That's where it all is. Bonnie always says it's too bad that I focus on the negative side, the dark aspects, the death and decay. But hey, that's the big trip. Don't push the river it flows by itself."

He's a 60s refugee but one who is comfortable with the label. The time left its mark on him, shaped him, and he won't "apologize for being in the time and place that I was. I was there. When I was a teenager, that's what formed me. The quintessential summer was '67, when *Sergeant Pepper* came out. It was magic. It was probably the first summer I got laid. I think we were more 'there' in terms of connected subjectivity. Kids are really disconnected these days, and there's a

real alienation. That's where these new writers come from. I read a capsule summary in *Locus* about a story by Kathe Koja that said it was about alienated teenagers who find a mysterious object which they know nothing about nor do they care. For me, that's a description of a boring story. If they're alienated and detached and

don't care about this thing they've discovered and they don't care about the mystery, why the fuck would I care about this story?

"There has to be connectedness and caring to some degree for

human involvement. And that's where I think at least several of the newer writers lose me. They seem disconnected, detached: they don't care. So, yeah, I sound like some 60s airhead saying 'all we need is love, la-la,' like a frigging aging flower child. If I do, then I guess I

do, but it seems to have given my life meaning. These people are writing, and they're saying 'There's no meaning.' No, goddammit, there *has* to be meaning! The way to reconnect—and here I'm going to say something like 'read my books!'—is to read fiction that reaches into archetypal, traditional things. The forms change, but the

content doesn't. It's like the Taoist image of water: water assumes the shape of the vessel it's in. The substance doesn't change, but the shape does.

"Powerful, mythical, archetypal stories will always speak. Look at the success of *Star Wars*: it's a very conscious reworking of what Campbell says the hero story is. It connected because it was working the real stuff. This is where I feel some of the newer horror writers aren't going to last, because they're not speaking to stuff that really matters. It's all alienation and no love, no caring, no real human contact. Here I go again, but listen to the new Springsteen album: *The Human Touch*. That's what it comes down to, because that's all we've got. In the face of death and decay and destruction and all the changes that will alter our lives, the one thing that brings me back is the fact that I can hug my wife and I can hug my kids and my friends. As an uptight Scandinavian it takes a lot to get



past that, but it's all you have in life when it comes right down to it, unless you look at all the superficials—the mortgages, the taxes—but a good Buddhist will tell you this too shall pass.

"That's what I'm going for in my books. I try to set out people with all their weaknesses and strengths. Even at the end of *Dark Silence*, Dianne and Brian and Ed have reconnected on a deeper human touch, sharing, caring level. It may be old hat. I know I'm an old fart. When I go to a horror convention I know a lot of the younger writers look at me like, oh there's Rick Hautala, he's one of the old farts. If traditional means I'm an old fart, then, yeah, I am. I'm sorry if they find that offensive or pathetic. I don't feel bad, so don't

feel sorry for me. This thing about daring ... anybody who genuinely explores dreams and myths and the subconscious goes up to edge and looks over. I don't think it's particularly daring to describe eviscerating someone. That's bogus. So much of this daring fiction reminds me of my teenage son. He's trying to be outrageous, and it's an immature, 'hey, look at me, I have my own self-identity' reaction.

"But, hey, I'm forty-three. I have children to raise. I have three pieces of the future in my hands, and they're going to grow up based on what Bonnie and I do. I take that very seriously. It's really too bad that any two idiots can get together and make children. It's a really delicate proposition to raise *human beings*. I feel a responsibil-

ity, and I think good fiction should humanize. If the thrust of the novel is alienated, detached, non-caring and superficial, it won't last as fiction because it doesn't have an impact. It's just the flavor of the month, and it will come and go. I don't mean to say, 'Whereas my stuff will last.' I don't know that. I don't know if I'm doing it right. I'm not the judge of whether I'm really hitting what I think I'm hitting. I enjoy the process of writing, and it's up to me to just keep doing what I like. I'm just entertaining."

Thanks to Rick for making time for this interview at the last minute, and Stefan Dziemianowicz, for being a great sounding board for lit. crit.

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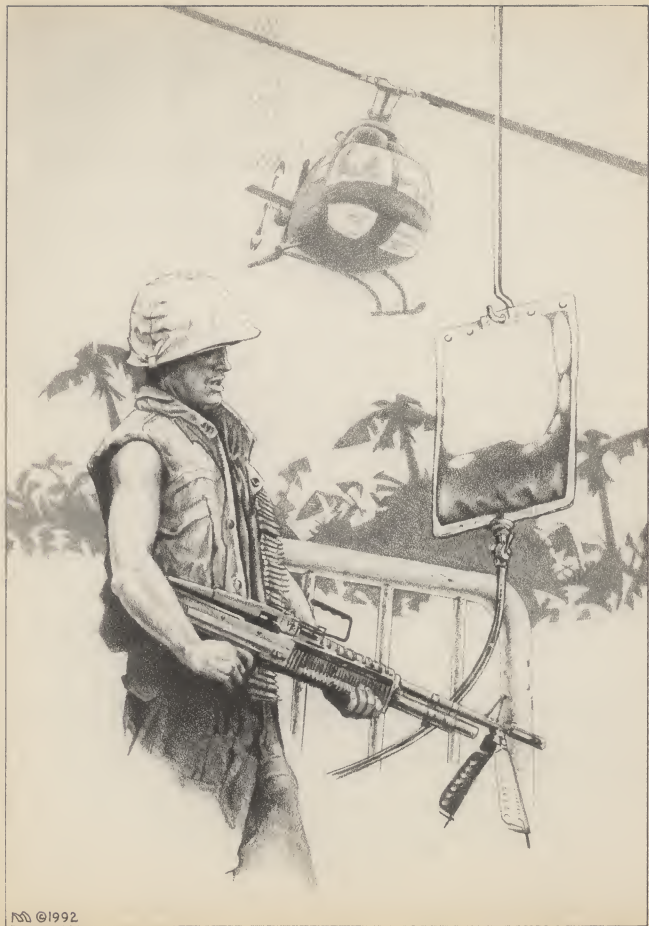
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The steady *whup-whup* of the blades made a heartbeat over his head, flying low over green, lots of green, and the crackle in his headset, that was Maddog, liking to clip the tops of the trees with the chopper blades if he could, Maddog giving his captain's account of how they're approaching the village of Phu Lai, fasten your fucking seatbelts . . . and McKraken steadied himself against the green metal of the chopper, scrunched in his flak jacket, this was the time of the silver fear, the kind you taste in your mouth because death is a roll of the dice, and Maddog didn't give a shit and McKraken didn't either, since that would mean the end of the mud and bullets and fire . . . even now as he lies flat on his back with a tube up his dick and a tube in each arm, this VA hospital dispensing the best government care a taxpayer's dime can give him, which means green industrial paint and yellowed pans, sheets white as bone and twice as hard, he can still hear the *whup-whup*, angry growl, touching down, get your ass down on the fucking ground, helmet bobbing on his head, and explosions from the shelling bubbling in his eardrums, you feel it before you hear it, deep in your gut, and in another place you feel the screams... he feels them now, as he turns his head to see the TV drip once more, smelling the saline solution, like the sea . . . Charlie had sprayed Phu Lai for weeks, so that the trees were withered husks, you could see them bent, the village lay exposed in the light of day, all you had to do was clean it up, so good old 84 company, being himself, Maddog, Dickey Spears, Randy Candy, and the others, rounded up the villagers and if any gave you lip then it was a *pop-pop-pop*, do what you had to do, you're too scared not to . . . and some are dead, or cowering, they got their little rice bowls, and the women are wailing, and how come these people can't even get clothes for themselves, and a stick-figure man was pleading with Dickey Spears, because he'd got himself one of the gook women . . . he tries to shift on

the bed, but his back has been sweating, he's stuck to the sheet, he can move his head and see the other beds lined up and down the room, their occupants asleep or dead, and he can smell the salt of his sweat, a doughy smell coming from the bed, he wishes he could think of other things, like why he joined up in the first place, a chance to escape the brewery that imprisoned his father, escape Milwaukee, man, got to travel, make a career out of it, but it had been so long ago, when in Phu Lai he stepped into the hut to escape the sun and saw in the corner the little gook girl, shivering . . . her arm had been smashed by a bullet, she was rocking with pain, and half her face was burned, a blackened mess, and cracked, because the pus was pushing through, breaking out . . . she'd never walk again, the shelling had pinholed her legs with shrapnel . . . he stood there breathing hard, erasing salt-sweat from his face, it would be mercy if he did it, it wasn't from anger, it wasn't because he hated them, it was because he wanted to save her . . . he raised his 16, it was mercy, through and through, and it would be better if he did it in the skull, because it would be quicker, you'll only see a big white flash, little girl . . . her eye as she turned it to him was black, all pupil, wet and glistening, rolling slowly in its orbit like she was an animal gone to ground . . . and then the back of her skull blew apart, cracking like an egg . . . when Maddog caught up with him he stared a long time, but McKraken had this real sick feeling deep in his gut, God man, she was like this when I got here, look what the shelling did, happened a while ago, but there was this little creaking sound that Maddog heard which was the bowl of her skull rocking on a reed mat . . . Maddog smiled and left, and turning to follow, McKraken saw in a little reed cage one of the hermit crabs they keep around for luck, and it must have outgrown its shell, because it was slithering half out of it . . . McKraken had done it out of mercy, not because he was mad; he wasn't mad when they had captured that hill where Randy Candy took a slug in the groin and lay bleeding, grabbing himself like it was almost funny, but doing it to keep the blood in . . . and they had found the bunker thing in the hill, which was really a part of the tunnels . . . what good was spraying when they got tunnels, but try telling that to fat men

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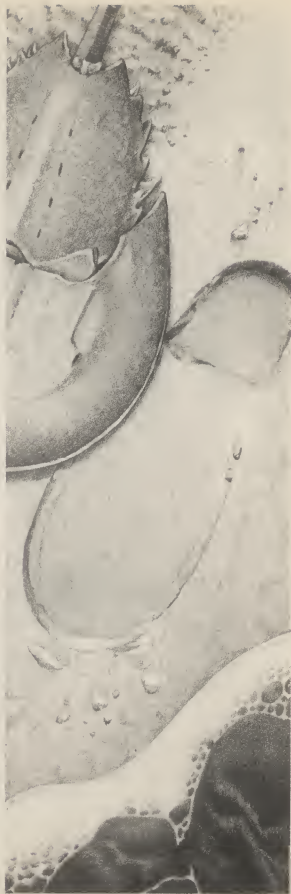
in leather chairs, and McKraken waited down in the bunker, feeling guilty because he wasn't with Randy like the others, but they would take care of him, he just wanted to be deep in the ground, safe, down here where all the sounds were muted, you heard your own breathing mostly, leaning his back against the muddy wall, his boots sucking in the gooey gunk, maybe not so great here, he just wanted a bit of peace, and black tree roots had sprung up in the mud . . . when his eyes adjusted they were moving, slithering in the wet, leaving trails, or maybe they were snails, 'cause weren't slugs just the same as snails, 'cause they came out of their shells once in a while? . . . the saline drips again, he imagines every drop traveling down the tube, tries to time it, how long does it take to get into my arm, that particular drop, it's one of the few things he can look at . . . the spray had gotten to him, he's flat on his back, legs paralyzed, all the legislation in the world wasn't going to cure shit, he can look down at the floor, near the foot of the bed, and now he sees a trickle of wetness spreading from under the bed, the TV must have a leak . . . they protected him, it wasn't going to be a secret with Maddog, he told everybody, must have made it sound like soft McKraken had some balls after all, no sissy boy here, he *blammed* that gook girl but

good, they wouldn't say a word, but it ate at him, the thoughts kept spinning in his mind, he did it because he wanted to kill, or he did it because he wanted to give her mercy, but maybe she could have been given some care, some healing, even a goddamn drink of water... they had reached a glittering sea on a pink dawn, support for 67 though they didn't need it, a cake walk, just walk along the beach, nothing here for us to do, God knows they must have sprayed here, there weren't no fucking trees, that's why you call it a *beach* . . . Dickey Spears was pissed because he'd had some buddies in 67 and they'd found bodies and thought Dickey was going to get himself some revenge . . . but walking along the sand, with the cold water shushing up around his toes, McKraken came up to Dickey where he was kneeling in the sand and holding in his hands a helmet, and Dickey was crying because he said it was the helmet of his old friend Johnny Max . . . McKraken looked at the helmet, it was black, and glistening with salt spray, bulbous towards the front, flatter towards the back with a spiky thing pointing behind it, and turning it over there was this membrane thing coating the inside, pink turning black, the army didn't issue no black helmets, and McKraken knew it was one of those horseshoe crabs, or at least what one of them had left

behind . . . it is the time of day when the sun would start inching around the iron-barred windows, it is already tickling the IV bottle with a pinprick, and McKraken has to look away down at the ground, and he sees that the wetness on the floor has spread, couldn't see it actually moving, but it has gotten bigger, and fear nibbles at his throat because he cannot move . . . one of the few reprieves they got was when they actually went shopping, it was all these little stalls and huts, and behind the curtained ones you could get drugs or whores, but there were souvenirs, and one place had turtle shells all painted up in yellow designs and McKraken thought about buying one, turtles were lucky too, gooks were ape-shit over them, matter of fact they had come across a pond near the sea, must have been a nesting place, but the sun was mighty strong or something, it was hard to see in the haze, you saw these shapes crawling over the sand, making for the water like desperate, and their backs were pink, not green, little beads of pus decorating them like pearls . . . McKraken must have been really doped up, because in the pond he saw a big shape swirling around, and it started to come out of the water, a big round thing, the hooked face, but soft, its body was soft and bloated with bits of tissue hanging off of it, he hugged himself with his flak jacket and hightailed it to the chopper. . . he could have told them about the girl at the hearings, but that's not what he was there for, he hadn't *sprayed* the girl, he had shot her, wouldn't have done any good to tell, it was too late, and he'd have been exposed, it was way too long ago . . . but still nothing had taken away the racing thought of it, every day, lying immobilized flat on his back, with the sun now creeping down the IV tube, how long would it take to reach him, maybe it was heating it up more than usual today because he could smell it, a tangy smell of salt and sea . . . he can feel the kiss of the sun on his cheek, God he wishes he could roll over on his side, just on his side, he pushes out with his hands, but can't rock his hips, he is stuck to the sheets with sweat . . . the sun crawls along his skin, making it gleam, bone-white, sun-white, and shaking his head in frustration he glances down at the floor . . . the pool of wetness has made a large circle and he can feel the scream of something slipping over it, under the bed . . . the sheet has slid to his hips, and his belly, fish-white, burns where the sun hits it, he can't move, can only look at the floor where he sees a hooked face and an eye, a large rolling eye that is all black, all pupil . . . and he wonders how long it has taken to get here, how fast do they move under water? . . . the sun bakes his skin as he flounders, I did it out of mercy, I did it because I hated, and the dripping from the IV says, you are one of us.

It came slithering from under the bed.

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Okay, I figured it was time to throw in a few words from the great fetid masses of you who clamor for my columns like groundlings at the Globe Theater. As usual, I will always please some of the people and be an object of displeasure to others. This is not one of those "okay" situations; rather, it is the preferred state of the universe. Don't forget the MAFIA motto:

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That You Are Nothing But Forgotten*

Yeah, words to live by. Just keep listening to your old Padrone

Tomasso, and you'll be boogie-in' on through life knowing who your friends are—and believe me, that's all you really need.

But enough philosophy for today. This isn't a lecture hall; we're not conducting a symposium here; this is a vehicle for opinion, a little illumination, and maybe even some laughs. (I know that some of you think I'm funny, because you've made the mistake of telling me so, and that just feeds the fires of egomania, making me even less tolerable than I may already be).

So, anyway, let me tell you a little story:

A couple of years ago, I'm up in Pittsburgh hanging out with my good friend and fellow writer, John DeChancie. We aren't exactly downtown, but we're driving around the exurbs that define the greater metropolitan area—a village called Bethel Park. Pittsburgh is an interesting and unique city in a lot of ways, and I like it for some of its funkier reasons. It doesn't have a real Little Italy neighborhood, but I can deal with it.

Now dig: John and I stop in a supermarket called Food Land (a

dumb name, don't you think? Sounds like the cats section of an amusement park . . .) to pick up some stuff for a bachelor-dinner that night. So we're walking through the store wise-cracking and being generally critical and elitist about all the stuff we're seeing in the store: everything from an entire aisle devoted to *Pet Food* while they're eating fucking sticks in Angola, to women in spandex pants with rear-ends that should display WIDE LOAD signs. If you've ever hung out with DeChancie and me, you'd know we can cut on just about anything and manage to entertain ourselves immensely.

So there I am pushing one of those carts, and I turn a corner and I'm a little surprised to see five or six long tables with beer case-boxes of paperback books, arranged spines-up. There's a big sign that says: *Paperback Books—95 Cents*. Being like most of us mutants, when I see books, I'm drawn to them, start reading the titles and authors along their leading edges. When I spotted something that looked interesting, I picked it up. There was only one problem.

It was a stripped book.

Okay, some of you might not be familiar with the term. What it means is this: a paperback book with its front cover torn off. I don't know if you've ever seen them, but they look like hell on the halfshell. The worst part of their tale is how they come into being in the first place. When Distributors buy box-car-loads of books from the various publishers—home to the many Suits of the industry—they get this deal wherein and wherefore if the books don't sell, they can return them.

Well . . . not exactly.

Problem is the Distributors don't want to pay the shipping costs to send back all those nasty, unsaleable books, so they reached a totally reprehensible "solution" with the Suits, who said: "Hey,

guys, no problem! You don't have to send back the *whole* book. Just rip off the front cover and send those single sheets back to us, and we'll still give you credit for the whole book(!)."

I know, I know, even on first hearing about it, you gotta figure it to be the most wrong-headed policy in all the world of commerce. But, let's examine the procedure in some depth and see what is really going on. First off, what other manufacturing industry allows its vendors, dealers, or wholesalers to not only return unsold merchandise for full credit, but also to return said merchandise in such a mutilated condition as to be unsaleable, unusable, and therefore 100% unprofitable?

Can you imagine a grocery store returning unsold cans of peas to the cannery but first ripping the lids off so the vegetables were all ruined? Any cannery exec who would agree to such a policy would be diced and canned himself. But our friends in publishing have let this horribly wasteful practice to become a precept for the industry. If you've ever gone to a regional newsstand distribution center and seen the *Everests* of paperbacks with their covers torn off, it would make you very cranky. And this anger should be exponentiated if you're a writer or making any attempt to not abet the gang-banging we're giving the planet's resources.

If this were the only set of reasons why all writers should be united to stop this absurd book-stripping routine, it would be enough. But as they say in the late-nite commercials: "Wait! There's more!"

By now, some of the less asexual among you might be wondering *Hey, what happened to him and DeChancie in the Food Land?* I'm getting back to it, but I had to hip some of the *untermenschlike* so they wouldn't get too confused when the trail got a little

twisty, okay? You see, we still have a few major questions that beg serious answers.

And the first one is: What happens to the *rest* of the book when it's stripped? Answer: Nobody knows. In theory, the books are supposed to be destroyed or recycled. But if that's the case, then we wouldn't need to ask the *second* important question, which is: So how the fuck did the stripped books get into places like Food Lion Supermarket? Answer: Nobody knows. But I can provide you with a scenario that's probably pretty close. Some Newsstand Distributor who leaves a shiny trail behind him wherever he goes waits till its dark before having his resident Igor gather up all the stripped books and load them into a waiting truck, which trundles them off to other midnight supply depots that box and allocate them to local vendors—second-hand stores, flea-marketeers, low-rent "everything" stores like K-Mart, food chain outlets, convenience stores, mom-and-pop-stop-and-shops, etc.—that can sell them at a cut-rate and still make some money. When the sun comes up, the stripped books are gone and *everybody's* making a little extra in their pockets except one guy—the shmendrick who wrote the book.

Figure it out and look how many ways the writer gets bent over the hood of a rusty pick-up and righteously butt-fucked.

1. He gets it from his publisher who sends him royalty statements that routinely withhold at least half of his earned royalties "against returns." (This means after they get around to counting up how many stripped covers of your latest opus have crawled back under the door, they will eventually pay you some money. This holding-against-returns policy is a license to gut and dress you like a deer. A writer has NO WAY of ever checking how many books have been

returned to supposedly cancel out his earnings . . .)

2.) He also gets the old In-Out from the slimeball Distributor who sells his stripped book to the crooked midnite vendors because as we all know, Slimeballs don't issue royalty statements. Actually, this level of the operation is kind of a double-prancing because the vendor has made money *twice* on the book—he gets credit for his stripped cover plus he sells the rest of the book out the back door for additional profit.

3.) The writer also gets to do the bump-ugly with all the bogus vendors who sell his book to the unsuspecting public who are just taking advantage of what is a real bargain.

And speaking of unsuspecting public, let's (*finally!*) get back to John DeChancie and me in the Food Lion . . .

I look at the stripped book and I ask out loud the obvious question: "What the fuck are these guys doing selling stripped books!?"

John shrugs. "Ah, they've been doing it for years."

"What?" I intone with incredulity, the beginnings of anger.

John looks at me kind of funny, then adds: "Yeah, I've bought some great stuff here. Have to pay five times as much for the same title in Walden's . . ."

I can't believe what I'm hearing. I run up to him with a Michael Crichton novel (sans cover) in my hand, almost push it through his face. "You what?!" I yell. "You *buy* these? You!? Are you fucking *pazzo!*? Brain-dead?! You! Of all people! You're a WRITER, you *mamalu!*!!!"

I am screaming at him now. People are pushing their carts past us, but giving us a very wide berth, as though we have begun spilling off some kind of toxic waste. I am becoming more animated and very

pissed off—both at the situation and John's laissez-faire posture.

"We shouldn't be buying these books!" I bellow. I throw the Crichton novel back into the bargain bin, and just as my eyes are turreting back to John, they lock onto a spine that has a hideously familiar configuration about it. I turn and seize the paperback, convulsing and bubbling with near-apoplexy. The title on the spine is *Night of the Dragonstar* and its authors are David Bischoff and Thomas F. Monteleone(!!!)

"Jesus Christ!" I scream. "Are you fucking kidding me?!"

A woman wheels by and tells me to watch my language.

"I *am* watching it! It's right here in this book!" I scream back at her. She looks at me like the derange-oid I most obviously have become. "They've stripped my book!"

DeChancie, my *goombah*, is looking all embarrassed and shit, and he is gesturing for me to calm down before the Food Police are roused to remove me from the premises. "What're getting so excited about?" he asks.

"These cheesy bastards are selling my books! And you ask me why I'm *pissed*!" I look at John and can't believe he's not as crazy as I am. Turning back to the bin, I find two more copies of my novel. I grab all three of them and start running toward the front of the store.

"Where're you going?" (That's John)

"I'm going to tell the manager he's selling my book ILLEGALLY! I'm going to tell him I'm TAKING these copies of MY book! I'm going to tell him he's getting his ass sued off so bad he's going to think he stuck it in the business-end of a lawn mulcher!"

DeChancie almost tackles me as I'm running down the aisle of laxatives and cold-n-flu remedies. He tries to calm me down, telling

me I'll be arrested, that if I put any pressure on the store, and the Mob gets wind of it (because he figures They are probably the one behind this sleazy scam operation) they will seek me out and Fuck Me Up, or worse, the Food Land will get closed up and the goodly people of Bethel Park, Pennsylvania will have nowhere to go to buy their groceries and Q-Tips and Hartz Mountain parakeet toys.

"*Fuck* their parakeet toys!" I yell at the top of my lungs. People are coming from other aisles to watch the show now. And John is now approaching his maximum embarrassment quotient.

He grabs me by the shoulders and throws me up against the Extra Strength Tylenol display. He tells me that if I don't shut up, we might get of Bethel Park's Finest down on our hind parts, and, he adds, he is going to punch me in my big mouth. (This last addenda, coming from John D., is a serious buzz, friends. Because he is such a quiet, low-key, never wants to bug you kind of guy, that if *he* says he going to pop you a good one, he *means* it. If I tell you the same thing, well, I'm such a hothead asshole, you probably have even-money odds on whether or not you'll actually catch up with some knuckles.)

So this last thought sinks in with me. I've pushed mild-mannered John to the edge of the Pit. He's ready to boogie down with me and he means it. Being no fool, I calm down and nod slowly. Then I turn to the assembling crowd with their grocery carts and tell them it's okay, it's just a fraternity stunt, and that everything's okay. (That John and I are looking a bit long in the tooth to be a couple of college mooks, doesn't seem to bother them; they nod knowingly and shamle off in search of lemony dish soaps and supersoft toilet paper.)

"Come on, let's get out of here," he says to me, taking the

books (MY books) out of my hands and putting them back in the display bin.

He reiterates his position that if I put out this little scam operation, there would be larger repercussions both for Bethel Park's only food supermarket and for my own miserable body. Funny thing is, as we leave the store, I half-believe him. It's very possible that the Food Land scam is part of a very big operation and there might be some serious money in it. And friends, if the money's serious, then so is everything else.

My story ends with this tragicomic coda: when we get back to John's place, I am wandering around his den where his computer and all his books are stashed, and on one of the shelves next to his desk, I spy a whole shelf full of stripped books, the selfsame ones he copped to buying when we were Food Landing it.

"No wonder you wanted me to put back those stripped copies of *Night of the Dragonstar*," I said loudly.

"Huh?" He was off in another room.

Reaching down, I picked up another stripped copy of my novel from John's shelf. He had unwittingly bought into the scam that was reaming, steaming, and dry-cleaning me and all the other writ-

ers in the Food Land and Christ knows where else . . . See that was the worst part of all this: how many times was this scam being repeated all over the country? How many thousands of our books were being sold in ways that would deprive us of our royalties? The scary thought is that it's extremely possible that *more* books are sold in their stripped condition than in their unmutated condition.

So what do we do? First off, if you ever see anybody running a stripped book operation, you *don't* do what I did. You turn the bastards in to somebody. Try to get it shut down, whatever you do. Secondly, write to your favorite publisher's, environmentalist groups, and your congressmen/women urging a stop to this bullshit practice of stripping the books. There is no other stance to take other than this: We've Got To Put An End To It. There's no rationale that can be substituted. In fact, I invite any publisher or distributor to write me and try to justify this insane nonsense that calls for our product, our *books*, to be mutilated.

The address, as usual, is:

P.O. Box 5788
Baltimore MD 21208

You might even get an ex-

cerpt in this column (Now there's an incentive . . .) and thereby afford you your 15 minutes of Warhol-guaranteed fame before the Universe grinds you up.

Thatzit for now. See you next issue, Cthulhu willing.

SHAMELESS HYPE PROMOTION DEPT.

My Tor hardcover novel, *The Blood of the Lamb*, was published in late summer, and it received rave, kick-ass reviews from all over the country, including a brilliant review in the *New York Times*. The first printing sold out in five weeks. I am happy, proud, and all that good shit. Do yourselves a favor and ask for it at your local bookstore. Or get a limited signed copy (due out in the Spring '93) from Borderlands Press. Also, the signed, limited *Borderlands 3* will be published at the end of November and it promises to carry on the tradition of leading-edge fiction that previous volumes have established. Great material by Avram Davidson, Whitley Strieber, Thomas Tessier, Ed Gorman, Kathe Koja, Poppy Z. Brite, and Elizabeth Massie, etc. make this a stunning work. Order from Borderlands Press, P.O. Box 32333, Balt MD 21208 or telephone (800)528-3310.

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MATTHEW J.
COSTELLO

NIGHTMARE ALLEY

I promised a laugh, last column. You remember, I said next time *you laugh*. And I've got a real knee slapper. Sure, but you'll have to wait until the end of the column . . .

Because it's time I said a few things about horror. Lots of things, actually, and I can only hope that I have enough space here.

To begin, for the 1992 Horror Writers of America Annual Banquet I invited a man named Sam Youd to be one of our lifetime honorees. Yes, *the* Sam Youd.

Okay, enough wisecracks, like who's Sam Youd, and is he the guy who wrote all those Civil War ghost stories (he isn't) or is he the man who created the radio show *Lights Out!*

No, Sam Youd is the real name of John Christopher. And beginning in the Fifties, Christopher wrote some seminal books that influenced me and I'll bet that he touched a few other writers. His post-apocalyptic books, *The Death of Grass* (1956) and *No Blade of Grass* (1957) were grim science fiction/horror tales written with a clean, contemporary edge that were an easy decade ahead of their time. Other strong books followed, including *The Long Winter*

and (my favorite) *The Possessors* — that is the most chilling take on the alien/body snatcher theme.

But starting in 1969, Christopher started writing for kids, creating the wonderful Tripod series (with *The White Mountains*) and other science fiction tales with the same realistic edge found in his adult fiction.

Lots of kids went through school and did their monthly book reports on Christopher's work. (I used to teach, and I *read* the reports . . .) His adult fiction vanished, only to be found on library shelves. Christopher told a compelling story with characters that, as the cliché goes, we care about. Never an easy feat.

I have a theory about that . . . about what makes us care and what scares us. And why we don't see too much that scares us lately. The theory runs something like this:

What's real horror, real fear? I know what it feels like. When I take my kids on a hike — my twelve-year-old boy, my nine-year-old girl, and my little two+ boy — they want to go everywhere, do everything. Sometimes we hike into this nature preserve near us, on a trail that ends at an abandoned railroad bridge.

The bridge is nothing but

rusted metal and rotted beams, a crusty mesh above the reservoir.

And when we get to the bridge I start to feel tense. I remind the kids, *hey stay off the bridge, stay away from the edge*. I hold my little boy's hand tighter.

I start to feel cold, real tense. And despite my warnings, the kids *do* go near the edge, they shoot rocks off the side and watch them plop into the water. My oldest boy climbs up, just to the edge of the rotted wooden beams that are all that's left of the tracks across the ridge.

And there's this *feeling*. My nuts are sucked into my body. I go dizzy imagining the possibilities, overwhelmed by the fantasy that one kid will lean out a bit too far, that the other will take a step onto the wooden beams, clawing at the rotten wood.

And after asking, then yelling at them to get back, I walk them away from the bridge, back to the trails, my testicles returning to their normal *detente*.

You may wonder why I go there if it scares me so much. And that's a real interesting question, real interesting . . .

But there's something else I want to say about fear. I grew up in the Fifties. There are a lot of us

out here, writing, recycling the terror we grew up with. And we remember going to school and rehearsing what to do in case of *nucle-are arma-ged-don*. We huddled under our school desks waiting for Russian missiles to rain down upon our heads. (And living in New York City, I knew I was in a prime target.)

And there was a night on Ed Sullivan when he showed an animated feature that gave the gift of nightmares to a generation of kids . . . "Tonight, on our really big *show*, you'll see the effect . . ." Close on Ed, making his fish face, "of nuclear attack."

Ed suggested getting the youngsters out of the room, but nobody did. And in minutes we were watching rabbits and deer caught in the forest by the first shock waves, their fur bursting into flame. The buildings were next, and then people, eyes melting, dripping like a Good Humor on a really hot day.

And this wasn't a fantasy. This was a possibility, a real possibility, friends, and a heavy load for seven-year-olds to carry around.

I remember once hearing the sirens go off when my family was on vacation at the Jersey shore. I think it was the same summer that two people were eaten by sharks. (Were you there that summer, Peter? Is that where it started?)

The sirens went off in the dead of night and I shot up, screaming, crying, "This is it. It's all over. Head for the Dairy Queen 'cause the missiles are coming."

They didn't, of course. Not on Earth-1, at least. But we slipped into the Sixties and we got to see a President shot, then the man that killed him shot, and somehow we found ourselves being ordered to strip down to our skivvies, skid marks and all, and cough, please, before getting a ticket to beautiful Southeast Asia.

And some of us, a lot of us,

took over buildings and faced real cops, real soldiers with guns who wanted us the hell out of those buildings. I saw kids panic, saying, "I can't hang, man. This is too much." And I nodded, 'cause fear is fear.

And then there were the drugs. Drugs suck. We all know that *now*. But back then, back in the era of hallucinogens, they were a door, just like Aldous said. A door. And we watched walls melt, and cats morph years before the word "hard disk" entered our vocabulary. We wrote giant paragraphs filled with inchoate, LSD ramblings. Until it was time to come back.

And the point is this.

There's real fear. Your nuts tighten. Something snaps a lug wrench on your balls, and your head spins. And if that's what you're trying to do, if that's what you're trying to write, you'd better try and get a taste of it.

And maybe writers coming from the post-Sixties wasteland, people who missed the nightly terror shows, the dreams of nuclear war, maybe they have trouble tapping into real fear. Maybe their spaced-out paragraphs seem too purposely weird because they didn't ride Tim Leary's pony back in the Sixties.

There's a difference here, and I think you can see it in the writing.

Which is my backhand way to recommend a book. I remember when I read Stephen King's *The Shining* and, late at night, I put the book down and damned if my bedroom didn't seem *alive*.

It was the wondrous effect of a very scary book. And I searched for that experience again. But for many years now I haven't been scared by much fiction. Overkill, people say, burnout. Everything new is old again.

I attributed it to my crossing the big "40" line. You can't be a

kid again. No more Saturday afternoon matinees pulling your swirling, shiny Korean Dragon jacket over your head while watching "I Married a Monster from Outer Space."

It was something you lose.

Then I read F. Paul Wilson's *Sibs*, recently published by Dark Harvest. *Sibs* hooked me when I read the two or three pages printed in *Cemetery Dance*. So I sprung for the hardcover.

The story — starting with a beautiful, sexually voracious woman who, for no apparent reason, jumps out a window — had all the pull of the best Hitchcock film. The tension grew, as I met the dead woman's twin, and a detective — her former lover who helped her — and finally the psychiatrist who had treated her.

It seemed like a suspense story, with all the wires being pulled ever tighter . . . Until midway in the book, fueled by these odd inserts in the book, scribbblings called "Notes from Purgatory," I became aware that something else was happening here, something involving multiple personalities, something very sinister.

I can't, of course, say any more. Except this: I write books, I spend a lot of time planning my plots so they surprise, trying to get the magic working. And *Sibs* fooled me, not once, but many times as the story revealed its true dimensions. Each trick sent my mind into a very creepy place, I actually got chills — and no book has done that in years.

And the finale created an unease that lasted for days.

I've been telling all the writers I know that they *have* to read this book. It's incredibly good. And now I've told you . . .

Now for the laugh, funny for you, not so funny for me . . .

I had a meeting at the offices of the USA Network where I was

going to meet with the Director of Original Programming, a couple of major executives, including the Vice President, and some others about a project that I might work on.

I was excited. I mean, this is the network that brings us Cartoon Express and Swamp Thing!

I was dressed in clean khakis and a brilliant white short sleeved shirt — very New York/Hollywood/trying-to-be-laid-back. But I was late to the meeting at Rockefeller Center, getting caught in a truck sandwich on 48th street. I hurried to the art deco lobby, pushed the elevator button, and then waited — forever — for the sleek elevator to take me up to the reception desk.

And when I got to the receptionist there was someone else there, a short woman, also obviously late, talking very animatedly with the receptionist. I was so impatient. Here I was late for my big meeting, growing later by the second. I stood in line behind the woman. (Afterwards I realized that hey, it's not a line. It's not a fucking line. You stand back, let the person finish their business, then calmly approach the recep-

tionist's desk. It's not 7-11.)

The short, attractively dressed and made-up woman finished her questions and then, in flight, late, hurrying, turned and walked right into me. *Bang!* as if she hadn't been aware of me at all.

The woman looked up and then, without a word, turned and ran, so late, dashing to the elevator, I shook my head and approached the receptionist.

"I have a meeting with . . ." I gave her my name. The silver-haired receptionist looked at me, nodded, and tried a number.

"It's busy," she said, glancing at me. I stood there. Time passed, the clock running. She called the extension again. She shook her head, looked at me, nodded. "Still busy." I smiled. You mean, I thought, there's no other way to contact the executives if one line is busy?

I waited. Time passed. A minute. Two . . .

And then the woman said, "Mr. Costello . . . Er, I have to tell you . . . that you have the perfect impression of a pair of red lips on your shirt pocket." I looked down, and sure enough there, on my brilliant white shirt, was the absolutely

most perfect, luscious image of lips. "The woman was so embarrassed by what she did . . . she just ran away."

The receptionist dug in her drawer. "Maybe this would help," she said, handing me a special handi-wipe to clean telephone key-pads. (Will wonders never . . .) I ripped it open and started smearing the perfect image. Now I had a wet pink blotch on my shirt pocket. The woman handed me another wipe.

She got through on the line and I could go on to my meeting, now with my tell-tale red mark. So, when I walked into the meeting with the executives, with their cool ties and cool shoes and cool haircuts, I had to — ha, ha — explain how I got this red smear on my shirt.

And I had to wonder. Why had the receptionist waited so long to tell me? What if she hadn't told me? Coming home to my wife would have been even more interesting.

Let me tell you.

It was a Hitchcockian moment.

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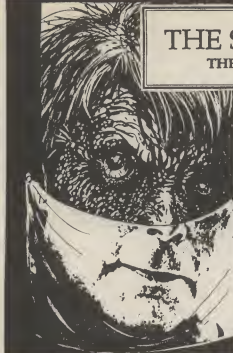
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DETAILS INSIDE**

from Douglas Winter, who solicited scholarship on the subject of the original short story from numerous King experts to show that there was no similarity between the story and the film. King won a temporary injunction removing his name from the film, with further court action to come in the fall.

Gerald's Game debuted in late June to generally favorable reviews, many of them praising the psychological depth of the novel as well as its plotting. The novel is now available from Penguin\HighBridge Audio in a twelve-cassette, unabridged reading. This go-round, the reading is done by actress Lindsey Crouse, rather than King. This makes sense, considering the novel's feminine perspective. The set is priced at \$34.95 and should be available at better bookstores everywhere.

The only fault I could find with the tape is its packaging. Once again, the tapes are stacked in six rows of two in a box which allows them to fall out if tipped the wrong way. I really wish this problem could be addressed. At least the tapes are unabridged, unlike the recent three-hour audio adaptation of Robert R. McCammon's Stoker-Award-winning novel, *Boy's Life*. Read by Richard Thomas, the adaptation trims the novel of all but the bare-bones mystery story, and although Thomas' reading is superb, to readers who know what is missing from the tape, it's just plain sad.

King fans will also be interested in *Horror News*, subtitled "Das Neue Stephen King Fan-Magazin," the official news organ of KRAG, aka "King Readers Association Germany." Now preparing its third issue, the magazine features superb commentary on things King, combined with world-class

production values, great graphics, an English-language edition and an international version of this very column. For information on price, etc., write to: KRAG, c/o Peter Schmitz, Postfach 1933, W-7910 Neu-Ulm, Germany.

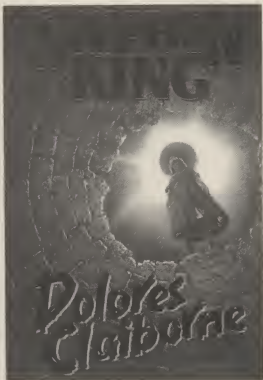
Speaking of Rick McCammon — and we did, a few paragraphs back, he and his wife Sally have plenty to be happy about. First, the couple became the parents of a baby daughter (all family members

wrong moment to send his life careening off the rails. When an arrogant bank officer tries to repossess Lambert's truck and winds up dead, Lambert finds himself on the run for his life. His journey takes him into a savage, primitive world hidden deep in the swamps of the Louisiana bayou country, pursued by a pair of bounty hunters who are among McCammon's finest creations ever.

The novel's title comes from a Vietnam-Era phrase which means messing up in a big way. It's also an Old-West phrase meaning that the person under discussion is dead. And death and rebirth is a theme at the heart of the novel. By the end of the book, Lambert and his female companion Arden, along with Flint Murtagh and Pelvis Easley, the two bounty hunters, all confront themselves in situations which strip away their preconceived notions of themselves and redefine the nature of the physical and spiritual quests they have been engaged in since the novel's beginning.

Although it lacks the marvelous qualities of magic which made McCammon's last novel, *Boy's Life*, an instant classic, *Gone South* is an excellent novel, bringing the quirky freakshow quality of the Southern Gothic tradition to bear on a contemporary theme with fascinating results. It continues McCammon's move away from the horror genre and toward a more mainstream audience, a move begun with *Mine* and continued with *Boy's Life*. It's well worth your time.

Angel Kiss is the latest, and by far the best, novel from Kelley Wilde. This go-round, the Wilde One combines aspects of his last two novels, the Japanese orientation (OUCH!!!) of *Makoto* and the



are reportedly doing fine). Then, the aforementioned *Boy's Life* deservedly scored this year's Bram Stoker Award for Outstanding Novel from the Horror Writers of America. And in the fall, McCammon's new novel, *Gone South*, made its hardcover bow.

The novel tells the story of Dan Lambert, a man who is finally pushed one step too far by fate, leading him to lash out at just the

San Francisco settings of *Mastery*, and mixes well with his own experiences as a former resident of Atlanta, Georgia to produce a novel which at one and the same time explores the author's feelings about life in the South and the relationships between men and women, culminating in the ultimate battle of the sexes in a shattering climax in a Victorian San Francisco mansion. Plus, you will never, ever, look at a plate of vermicelli the same way again...

Stuart Woods' latest novel, *Santa Fe Rules*, starts off with a bang. Film producer Wolf Willett wakes up one morning shortly before Thanksgiving and discovers from a newspaper that he, his wife, and his best friend have been found murdered in his house, and that he has lost a day out of his life. About three hundred pages later, readers will know who the killer is, but only after putting in an all-nighter getting through the last ten

chapters or so.

Woods gives readers all the information they need to know to solve the mystery themselves, and if you're sharp, you should be able to figure it out. But along the way, there are plenty of twists and turns, a new puzzle every time the one before it is unraveled, and by the time the book is finished, it will be apparent that very few people in this novel are who they seemed to be on first impression.

Dave Hinchberger's Overlook Connection Press is releasing a 300-copy signed limited edition of Gary Raisor's new novel, *Less Than Human*, packaged in an oak coffin, complete with brass hinges and latch. I've seen the prototypes of the coffins, and they really look nifty. In addition, the book is illustrated by noted tattoo artist Guy Aitchison, who also has a heavy-metal LP cover or two under his belt. There is also a 1,000-copy trade hardcover edition. For order-

ing or info, write Dave at P.O. Box 526, Woodstock, Georgia 30188, or call 404-926-1762.

Ray Bradbury spent seven months in Ireland in 1953, working on the screenplay for "Moby Dick" with legendary filmmaker John Huston. Now, he has woven his classic stories from this period together with new material into a unique blend of fantasy and fiction called *Green Shadows, White Whale*. The result is a work which chronicles a young writer's pilgrimage as he seeks to learn the secrets of his craft from a living legend, and along the way becomes enamored of, and privy to, the secrets of a land whose magic nearly predates time itself.

Fans of police procedural mysteries will be delighted to know that a new addition to the late Dave Pedneau's "alphabet soup" series of novels has recently come out from Ballantine. This one is enti-

FROM THE EDGE OF DARKNESS . . .

Tyson Blue, noted horror critic and author of the popular *Cemetery Dance* column, *Needful Kings & Other Things*, draws back the veil on nearly ten years of essays and criticism in . . .

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE TERMINATOR

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ted *Y.F.D.*, which, like its predecessors, features Raven County DA's Investigator Whit Pynchon and his girlfriend, journalist Anna Tyson-Tyree. This go-round, the pair are up against a man dressed as a clown who has kidnapped a young girl from a less-than-savory daycare center.

Elmore Leonard has long been a favorite of mine, and his new novel, *Rum Punch*, serves up more of the quirky characters and seamy situations which have made him a legend in his field. This go-round, Leonard chronicles the misadventures of Max Cherry, a bail bondsman who wants something more, who becomes entangled in a double-double-cross scheme involving a crooked Florida arms dealer. Although not quite up to the standard of his

previous novel, *Maximum Bob*, this is classic Leonard, and that's good enough for me.

James Bond is back, as well, continuing his espionage escapades into the post Cold-War era in *Death Is Forever*, by John Gardner. This time out, someone is knocking off members of an old East German spy unit named Cabal. Bond's job is to find out who is behind the murders, a quest which takes him across Europe several times and culminates in a race against time beneath the English Channel to save the combined governments of Europe. This one is particularly interesting for the ways in which Gardner manages to give 007 something to do in this Post-"Russia House" spy world.

And last but not least, by all

means don't miss F. Paul Wilson's *Nightworld*. The end of his so-called *Nightworld* cycle, this book chronicles the ultimate confrontation between good and evil as the sun begins slowly going out. Elements of a number of Wilson's earlier novels are skillfully brought together here, and his popular Repairman Jack faces perhaps his greatest challenge in these pages. This is definitely one not to miss.

In closing, I apologize for the brevity of some of the reviews. However, what with the King story and the extra King news, and the fact that I wanted to mention all these books, something had to give, and this time it was depth. We'll be back next time with a review of *Dolores Claiborne* and lots more.

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PIECES

RAY GARTON

RAY GARTON is the author of the horror classics *Live Girls* and *Crucifax Autumn*, and many other popular novels, including his most recent *Dark Channel*. "Pieces" is brief and to the point . . . and very sharp.

I've been coming to pieces lately.

It seems that the more things come together in my mind, the more I come to pieces.

I've been in therapy for a long time, but it really hasn't seemed to help. Oh, sure, it's made me break down and cry a few times — something that men, in our society, aren't really supposed to do, no matter what Phil Donahue says — but it hasn't improved things any. I wasn't even sure why I was there in the first place, except that something just seemed . . . wrong.

Just a few days ago, it hit me. It was like a lightning strike, like a sixties acid flashback or some sort of memory flash a Vietnam vet would have. My father hovering over me in bed in the dark of one rainy night, telling me that we were just playing a game, that's all, but a secret game, a *secret* game that no one else could know about, so I would have to keep it a secret, a deep dark secret, and tell nobody, *nobody*. But the game hurt. It hurt bad.

It came to me while I was sitting alone one night on the sofa in only my underwear reading a magazine article about child abuse, and it seemed to come out of that part of my brain that was only black, with nothing in it, like a blind spot in my eye. In fact, it *exploded* from that part of my brain and, at the same time, the fourth and fifth toes dropped off my left foot, which was dangling loosely from my knee and fell to the carpet with soft little tapping sounds.

Of course, that wasn't my only problem at the time. My wife had just left me because, as she put it, "You are un-understandable. There's something about you that is unreachable and untouchable and it seems to make you just as angry as it makes me sad. I can't take it anymore."

So she left. A few hours later, my right earlobe broke away and peeled off like a piece of dead skin.

But I guess that's getting off the subject, isn't it?

Back to the secret games. I'm not sure when they happened or how long they went on. I'd never brought it up with my therapist. I'd stopped therapy some time ago because I figured I could sit home and cry for a hell of a lot less money, and the memory flashes did not start until my appointments stopped.

I had six weeks of vacation coming at work — I'm a shift manager at a power plant — and after my wife left me, I decided to take them all at once. I had nothing in mind, just . . . rest. A relief, I guess.

I remember something my wife told me. She said, "There's something inside you that you know nothing about and you have *got* to take a break, just take a vacation from your life and find out *what it is!*"

That wasn't my reason for taking the vacation. I was just tired. I mean, your wife leaves you, you get hit with some memory you hadn't conjured up since you were a kid . . . you deserve a vacation, right? So I took it.

To tell you the truth, I wasn't that concerned about my earlobe or my toes. I tossed them into the trash. No big deal, really. It hadn't hurt, there was no bleeding and I didn't even have a limp. But I admit I was surprised by the suddenness of their departure. But so what, right? A couple toes? An earlobe? Big deal.

So, I took the vacation. I had nothing in mind but to sit around the house and relax, do nothing. Watch TV. Watch movies on the VCR. Read. Sleep. Relax.

Then I got broad-sided by that memory, that . . . *thing*.

I put it out of my head, went out of the house and browsed through a video store and picked up half a dozen movies to watch. The video store was in a mall and, to pass the time, I decided to do some window-shopping.

It was outside a store called Art 2 Go that the next memory hit me. In the window, I saw a painting of a little boy who looked so innocent . . . and yet, there was something in his eyes that seemed so *adult*, so grown up and mature, and so very, very haunted.

My mind suddenly filled with the memory of my

father holding me down on his lap, and I remembered the hard, throbbing thing beneath me.

My left hand dropped to the floor.

I stared at it as if it were an ice cream cone dropped by a child.

A fat woman with red-dyed hair and carrying a brown paper bag began to scream. She screamed and pointed at the hand and dropped her bag.

I swung the plastic bag of videos under my left arm, picked up the hand, and hurried away, hoping no one else had noticed. The woman's screams faded behind me.

I took it home with me, that hand, and put it on the coffee table, staring at it as I sat on the sofa. Suddenly, I didn't want to watch any of the videos I'd gotten.

But I put one in anyway. Just for the noise. I sat on the sofa, mostly staring at my hand on the coffee table. Occasionally, I looked up at the movie. At one point, I saw a screaming little child being chased down a hallway by a man whose big hands reached out like mitts to clutch the child's hair and—

—I suddenly remembered the time my father had done the same to me. The memory had come from nowhere, slamming into my face like a slab of concrete.

My right arm disconnected itself from my body and slid out of my shirt sleeve, falling to the floor with a *thunk*.

The child on television screamed, and was dragged backward to the bedroom.

My eyes widened until they were bulging.

My left arm plunked to the floor.

I began to cry uncontrollably. I couldn't help myself. The tears flowed and my body—what was left of it—quaked with sobs.

My father had done that very thing to me. He had done many other things to me, things that pranced

around at the edge of my memory. I wanted to remember them, to bring them up . . . and yet, I did not, because they were horrible, far too horrible to hold up before my mind's eye for inspection.

I looked at the coffee table and saw my hand. I thought of my earlobe and toes. I looked down at the floor and saw my pale, disembodied arms.

And suddenly I felt sick.

I rushed, armless, to the bathroom and vomited for awhile, then hurried into the bedroom, assuming I had little time left.

In the bedroom, I had an electric typewriter set up on a small table. I managed to place a piece of paper firmly in the carriage with my mouth, then lean down and use my mouth to reel the paper in. Then, I began to type this with my nose. It has taken a long time.

But in that time, my mind has been working frantically with the memories that have been conjured up like bloated corpses from the bottom of a bog. In fact, just a few minutes ago, I remembered my father saying to me once, "Just pretend it's a popsicle, that's all . . . just a popsicle . . . suck on it like it's a popsicle." And then my right leg, from the knee down, slid out of my pantleg like a snake and thunked to the bedroom floor.

I've been trying not to think about it, trying to concentrate on what I'm doing, typing this as fast as I can with my nose, to tell whoever finds me what happened.

But another memory comes to mind, this one far worse than all the others, more painful, and

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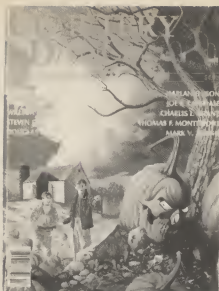
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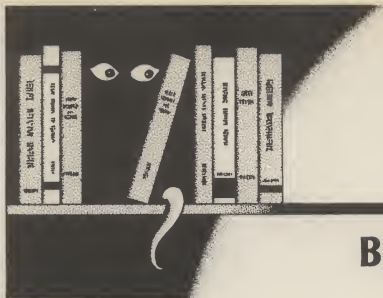
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EDWARD BRYANT

BOOK REVIEWS

Robert R. McCammon's Bram Stoker Award-winning *Boy's Life* is a hard act to follow, but his new novel, *Gone South* (Pocket Books, \$22, 341pp), is a valiant and largely successful attempt. He's also not repeating himself. *Boy's Life* was a coming-of-age epic of mythic proportions and resonances set in the Alabama of three decades ago. *Gone South* is located in southern Louisiana in the unhappy present, a time when lives and livings are foundering in the hard times of the Bush years. *Boy's Life*, though the literalness may be argued, was energized by fantasy and magic; in *Gone South*, the old fantasies are imperiled by harsh pragmatism. In the first novel, Eden is already in the process of rezoning; in the second, the bulldozers have started flattening the idyllic landscape.

The novel's title bears multiple meanings. To McCammon's Viet Nam vet protagonist, Dan Lambert, "gone south" is in-country jargon for screwing up badly. Later he finds it's Cajun patois for dying. But first, Dan goes south literally after he's caught up in a nasty situation where he shoots a bank loan officer in self defense. Pursued by the cops who believe he's a stone killer, Dan is an unem-

ployed, terminally ill everyman getting pulled into the grinding cogs of society's inhumane machinery. He's dying from leukemia and a brain tumor catalyzed by Agent Orange.

Dan is pursued by a pair of true southern grotesques. Flint Murtaugh is a one-time carnival freak who now works as a bounty hunter for a Shreveport loanshark. Flint has an unformed twin brother still alive and living in his side. His partner is Pelvis Eisley, a highly unsuccessful Elvis impersonator (Eisley prefers the term "interpreter"), who's trying to kick-start a new career in bounty hunting after taking a mail-order detective course. Eisley can't quite trust his own identity, so he's highly dependent on the Presley mystique, a theme that McCammon has quite a bit of fun with.

As Dan flees, he picks up a sidekick, Arden Halliday, a young Texan disfigured by a port-wine mark that covers half her face. Fleeing Texas dust, filled with Texas grit, Arden is on a determined pilgrimage to find the Bright Girl, a legendary healer who is rumored to live in the southern bayou swamps. Everything comes to a head in an isolated oil town close to the Gulf when a variety of

drug criminals get involved with the pursuit and escape of Dan Lambert.

By turns heart-wrenching and heart-stopping, *Gone South* evokes the shade of Flannery O'Connor and the more contemporary tangs of Harry Crews and Joe R. Lansdale. This is a very funny book, with humor ranging from broad to stiletto-pointed. Toward the end, there are more alligators than you can shake a grog-gig at.

But what *Gone South* mainly is, is an affecting and humane novel of lost and desperate people trying to keep whatever lives they've got, together. In the hands of a good writer, that's always an effective theme. In this book, Robert McCammon is a very good writer indeed. And in *Gone South*, he continues his deliberate drift away from overt fantasy. There is still magic here, but it's in the form of fantasy being only the goal, not the means; the actualization of that goal is up to the real-life grit and determination of the characters.

Gone South is full of priceless moments—such as the big musical number scene when Pelvis Eisley regains his own identity and turns out to be a Roy Orbison in the rough. Or the hideous fate dealt out to his beloved dog, Mama.

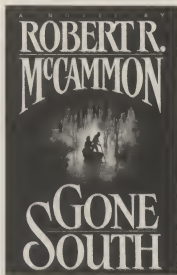
This novel's pretty wonderful, actually, and it marks more evidence that Robert McCammon is continuing to build himself a major American literary career. But it's not always subtle. I can't help but feel a real key to this all is an aside in which one of the novel's cameo characters is filling in her time: "She turned her attention again to the crossword puzzle. The next word Across was four letters, and its clue was 'Destiny'."

Some years ago, John Wooley and Ron Wolfe enjoyed some modest success with a collaborative horror novel called *Old Fears*. Now they're back with a much more sure-handed enterprise called *Death's Door* (Dell Abyss, \$4.99, 388pp), a new entry in the Dell Abyss line. *Death's Door* is a large and congenial lout of a novel, sometimes rough-edged, but still exuberant, highly energetic, and displaying a nastily edged sense of humor. It is an astonishing amalgam of diverse elements, a stew of effects and tones that doesn't always seem to add up to a coherent whole, but by-God entertains mightily along the way.

I'm really tempted to tag *Death's Door* as something of a blue-collar Kathe Koja novel. Admittedly Koja is still too new to draw on confidently as a literary touchstone, but she is undeniably a writer of high ambition and unconstrained style. Her most recent novel, *The Cipher*, was about a man whose near-death experience shot him back to this world with a disturbing passenger. The same plot device was used by Dean Koontz in *Hideaway*. Ideas are writer's common property. At any rate, *Death's Door* revolves around a guy whose return from beyond the pale (twice) brings back something pretty sinister. Koja's novel is told in an exquisitely machined way that tends either to create instant and extravagant appreciation, or it

packs readers off screaming. Either direction, the reactions are strong. Wooley and Wolfe spin an accessible tale with some sophistication, but there's a real sense of aiming to please the crowd. And there's certainly nothing wrong with that. Not so long as Wooley and Wolfe's fictive ambitions are supported by the collaborators' ability to juggle about ninety-zillion characters and plot elements all at once, and never let the strain show.

Mostly, they are, and the strain doesn't. Case Hamilton is a



tough cop who nearly gets blown away in a liquor store holdup. After his recovery, his nerve is gone and he takes a rent-a-cop job at Cedar Ridge Medical Center, the base of power for Case's savior, surgeon and researcher, Stephen Glasser. Glasser's an expert with both a scalpel and a circuit chip, not to mention being a hotshot cocksman. He's been conducting an affair with Case's daughter Diana, a 27-year-old cop herself. There's one amusingly perverse, if still ominous, sex scene after which the doctor, ever the egotist, totes up his box score for the encounter: "Three fake noses. One crashing orgasm."

Dr. Glasser has just developed his latest medical invention, a process he decides to dub electro-ani-

mation. It's just like it sounds. Glasser, with no little amusement, thinks of himself as the new Dr. Frankenstein. After Case dies a second time, this time stabbed by a neo-punker zonked on Mother's Milk, a chancy new designer drug, Glasser makes sure he again gets to revive his one-time patient: "Dr. Frankenstein threw the switch. Mozart called forth a chorus—and the lightning struck." Unfortunately for all concerned, Glasser's radical method has unanticipated side effects. Case finds himself with a ghastly alter ego called the Gray Man, an entity with unpleasant ambitions for all humankind.

Diana has to track down her dad, believing him to be a psychotic killer. Case attempts to deal with his own private—and literal—demon. And Glasser, everyone's distasteful ideal of the brilliant, ego-driven scientist, seduces, intimidates, or murders anyone of consequence to his career. Filling in the literary chinks are an adroitly drawn assembly of cop partners and ex-partners, girlfriends, gang members, media sluts, family abusers and the abused. It's all very visual. There's a little Cronenberg here, even more David Lynch.

I was vastly entertained, and yet the book didn't wholly come together for me. I felt like I was viewing a bright and complicated tapestry, but one of exceedingly loose weave. But the constant flow of edgy humor and inventive detail mostly helped me over the rough spots. Mostly, *Death's Door* is a novel I think could have benefited from just a bit tighter writing. And I am not faulting it for what it is not; just pining for what it might have been.

Kristine Kathryn Rusch is one busy writer. When not being a major editor, she has delved into high fantasy (*White Mists of Power*) and science fiction (*The Gallery of His*

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Dreams). Now, collaborating with Kevin J. Anderson, she tackles dark fantasy in *Afterimage* (Roc, \$4.00, 288pp). Both Anderson and Rusch are relatively new, and very hot. Does the collaboration parlay their individual talents into a synergistic triumph? Not as much as it may well in the future.

It's not that *Afterimage* is a bad book. It's a perfectly respectable novel with some terrific moments. What's here bodes well for Rusch and Anderson in the future (they're going to pool their talents on at least one more book, a sequel called *Aftershock*).

The first good moment is the initial chapter. Rebecca Tamerlane is a 26-year-old bookstore clerk of little ambition and a less-than-charismatic personality. Shoot. One might as well just say it: she's not terribly likable. Her major positive attribute is that she's kind to cats, and that's not a recommendation in just everyone's book. Rebecca is walking down a Santa Cruz street one afternoon when she gets taken in by a Ted Bundy-ish psycho. Before the end of the chapter, she's brutally beaten, raped, and burned alive. This being a fantasy, the book doesn't end. Rebecca finds herself bewilderingly rescued by a passel of elfin types called darklings. The darklings are shapechangers, in the sense that they involuntarily reform their bodies any time someone nearby dies.

For reasons clouded at first by mystery, Rebecca's salvation is a darkling woman name Gatha who has resurrected her. The only problem is, the human has a new form — and it's the spitting image of the last thing she saw before she died. Her killer. Rebecca now has a man's body. What's more, there were witnesses to her would-be murderer's depredations, so now Rebecca has to worry about being arrested by the police. And in the meantime, she's offered one slim

chance to regain her old form.

Most of the novel is the account of Rebecca's uncertain attempts to regain her old body and bring her killer to justice. There are regular steps to the side to view Santa Cruz homicide detective



Matthew Adolphus's attempts to solve an ever more puzzling case. We are also privy to darkling politics and the question of whether there's a relationship between the serial murderer who brutalized Rebecca and a power-driven plot on the part of one or more of the shapeshifters.

It's all a great plan for a novel. Fairies and serial killers? Gangbusters. The best thing Anderson and Rusch do is to make sure there's nothing really cute going on here. *Afterimage* is dark; it may be a fantasy, but not of the elfy-welfy variety. No, it has its moments of genuine toughness.

But it also has many moments of genuine noninvolvement. This is a novel that somehow stops short of convincing us to cringe, cry, fight, snap, burn, and bleed with its protagonist. The energy just isn't quite there. It's not that Rebecca's not terribly engaging; it's much more that the awful reality of first violently dying, then coming back as the opposite gender (twin horrors, some would say) is not as

convincing as one could wish. I think Rebecca's transsexual exploration is never quite as specific and complete as the reader could hope.

Then there are the darklings. The shapechangers are about as mundane, even banal, a group of magical folk as one could ever meet. What we get of their natures, their plots and ambitions and conspiracies, is just not as exotic as would seem appropriate. They're really *normal*. The ultimately unmasked villain is not terribly intimidating. And even such supporting characters as Daniin, the human-groupie who moons after a mortal woman, stops just short of realizing his potential.

So this novel, too, is frustrating in that it's not a bad book, just one that falls short of its possibilities. As a reader, I could easily stand some more solid hard-boiled fantasy. I'm glad that Anderson and Rusch are working on a sequel to *Afterimage*. I hope very much that the authors will loosen up and let their individual — and considerable — energies flow into *Aftershock* and bring it to complete life. In other words, allow it some magic.

Dan Simmons has published three books so far this year, and all three have been eminently worth reading. *Children of the Night* was good, *The Hollow Man* was brilliant, and now there is *Summer Sketches* (Lord John Press, \$25, 122pp).

With *Summer Sketches*, it's not hyperbolic to suggest that the book is the sort of project Wallace Stegner might well essay. Stegner's new nonfiction collection, *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs*, is subtitled "Living and Writing in the West." Stegner was recently anointed by *Newsweek* as the core writer in the new American west, the collateral suggestion being that the west is finally about to be recognized as a fecund center for spectacular literary effort, perhaps comparable to

the Renaissance of the American south in the '30s.

Indeed, the Simmons book is about living *and* writing, though not just in the west. *Summer Sketches* leads from strength with an essay about the primacy of *placeness*, of the value of location in writing. Simmons suggests that John Updike's criticism of SF for being a genre preoccupied with placeness may not be precisely on the mark; rather the problem may be that SF writers put considerable energy and imagination into creating their fictional locations, then get lazy and skimp on "the minor details of prose style, characterization, plotting, theme, texture, and auctorial sensitivity." I've no disagreement. Simmons makes his points with intelligence and wry wit.

Summer Sketches is constructed around a gimmick. The device is to alternate facsimile pages and transcriptions of Simmons's own travel journals, on-location sketches, and passages from his published novels that reflect the original observations. The primary stories illuminated in this fashion are *Song of Kali* (Calcutta), *Carrion Comfort* (Charleston), *Phases of Gravity* (Bombay and Lonerock, Oregon), "Iverson's Pits" (Gettysburg), *Children of the Night* (Romania). As a bonus, the author includes the entire hand-written outline of the last novel.

The contents fascinate. Simmons self-deprecatingly puts down his sketches as mere doodles. While some of them are exactly that, others are far more accomplished. The man clearly possesses some visual talent, both for pictorial note-taking and for cartooning.

It would be a mistake to dismiss *Summer Sketches* as a minor indulgence by a rising and successful writer. It is not simply a footnote to an unfolding literary career. The book is a fictive

equivalent to my suggested simple plan for learning how to write film. I've often advised would-be script writers to compare and contrast a book they enjoy, the written script adaptation, and the videotape of the resulting film. Simmons's book does that sort of thing. It offers a set of keen insights into the creative process. All in itself, *Summer Sketches* is a de facto writing course taught by a fine writer.

If the book has a downside, it's that the collection is too brief. One must assume that the journal entries reproduced are just the tip of the iceberg. The sense of literary autobiography evoked here is tantalizing. The reader is left desiring much more, and still contemplating the Joseph Conrad quote with which Simmons ends his introduction: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you *see* — and no more, and it is everything."

SHORT TAKES

Nancy Collins takes her tough, cool, contemporary vampire hero, Sonja Blue, and gives her a nice little novella in which to play in *Cold Turkey* (Crossroads Press, \$12, 36pp). This is a handsome chapbook, illustrated by Mark Masztal, that shows the protagonist of *Sunglasses After Dark* and *In the Blood* off to good advantage. Sonja's up to her old tricks, ever the vengeful vigilante, killing the undead when she has the opportunity. She's still battling with her own dark side when she unexpectedly encounters a Nice Guy named Judd in a New Orleans bar. Judd cottons to Sonja and just won't take no for an answer. The ominously genial demon Malfeis also makes an appearance. This is vampiric, post-punk, metal-fanged, dark doomed romance at its best.

Back in 1988 I judged a story

contest for the Science Fiction Writers of Earth and picked three winners. The first two were E. Rose Sabin and K. D. Wentworth, novice writers who are continuing to build their careers. The third place prize went to Sue Ellen Sloca for a story called "Candles on the Pond." Now that story is out in the dignity and attractive package of a Short Story Paperback from Pulpouse Publishing. *Candles on the Pond* (\$1.95, 44pp) is the tale of Dahni, a young woman born "without a soul" into an isolated tribal village. Told from Dahni's point of view, the story feels like fantasy, but is actually anthropological science fiction. Sloca takes one of SF's favorite themes, cultural first contact, and focuses her examination through the magical lens of the naming of names. It's a good story and I think it's been rewritten a bit since the version I saw in the SFWoE contest. I'm led to believe this will be the last original Short Story Paperback, and that's too bad. It's an attractive package for spotlighting an original story and a promising new author.

I've already reviewed John Skipp and Craig Spector's Bantam paperback anthology, *Still Dead*. However I really must put in a good word for Mark Ziesing's specialty press hardback edition of the book. A trade hardback of this collection of nineteen new zombie stories costs thirty bucks; the signed, limited edition goes for a bit more — \$85. It's worth it. Arnie Fenner's design and lettering and Richard Berry's cover and color interior plates turn the book into an artifact of dark and disquieting beauty. Barry had previously given the Don Grant edition of Peter Straub's *Mrs. God* an enormously attractive visual quality. Now *Still Dead* benefits from the same sensational artistic sensibility.

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BOB MORRISH INTERVIEWS CHARNEL HOUSE

SPOTLIGHT ON PUBLISHING

This issue's spotlight falls squarely on a "small press, big ticket" publisher in New York. Charnel House specializes in high-priced, very limited editions which feature elegant craftsmanship and often exotic materials. Even if you're a small press fan, there's a good chance that you may never have even seen one of Charnel House's titles. The three books that CH has published to date — *The Stress Of Her Regard* and *Last Call* by Tim Powers, and *The New Neighbor* by Ray Garton — have each come in editions of 400 numbered and 26 lettered copies, making them pretty scarce commodities. The lettered editions are particularly renowned among high-end collectors; the lettered edition of *The New Neighbor*, which was bound in leather and lace, received an award from specialty book dealer Barry Levin for the Most Collectible Book of the Year.

The front man for CH is Joe Stefko, who's actually better known in many circles for his drumming. Stefko has been with the rock group The Turtles for thirteen years now, with stints with a variety of other bands, including Meatloaf, Hot Tuna, Edgar Winter, and John Cale. Although Stefko's musical career continues to

be successful, he's found a second love in book publishing, as he explains below.

CEMETERY DANCE: How and why did you get involved in publishing?

CHARNEL HOUSE: Two reasons, really. I'd been collecting for a while and . . . I wasn't too happy with some of the books that I was buying. I thought they could be done a bit better. But the main thing was that Tim Powers came to a concert that I was doing and he was telling me about his new novel, which was *The Stress Of Her Regard*. And it was about vampires and Keats and Byron and Shelley . . . and I like all of that. So I just asked him if he would trust me with publishing (a limited edition of) it, and he said "yeah." Surprised the hell out of me.

CD: How did you choose the name for your press?

CHARNEL: It's kind of a play on Random House, something like that. I mean . . . a charnel house is where they use to store dead bodies during plagues when they couldn't bury them all. I thought

the name was perfect.

CD: I understand that you have a partner in the business — who is that mystery person?

CHARNEL: Tracy Cocoman. I get all the credit, but it's really the two of us. It's just that I'm the loudmouth and the visual one. We've been together for quite a while.

CD: Is there any clear-cut division of duties?

CHARNEL: Well, I do the talking. I make the deals, call the artists and publishers and so forth. But we design the books together, inside and out, and decide together on who we want to try and publish.

CD: You mentioned that your disappointment with some of the limited edition books you bought helped to spur you to get into publishing — were there any particular small press publishers who *did* impress you?

CHARNEL: Oh, yeah, we've always liked Jeff Conner's stuff (Scream/Press). He did some nice things. And the lettered state of the Phantasia Press books. He

(Alex Berman, the man behind Phantasia) went all out, he did some really crazy things with them, and that really got us going. In our lettered editions, we get kind of crazy, too.

I know that it sounds bad to have the first thing that comes out of my mouth be that I don't like a lot of the limited editions that have been published, but . . . I like people who do something *interesting* with the book, rather than simply tipping a signature page into what's basically just a trade edition. I don't mind spending money on a well-made book, but ink I can buy anywhere.

CD: You mentioned that *The Stress Of Her Regard* was your first book. As I understand it, your edition was unedited and differed quite a bit from the mass market edition.

CHARNEL:

Well, our edition was uncut, but, in this particular case, Ace didn't exactly rip it apart; they didn't do too much to it.

I generally like to take the author's original text — what they wanted to see printed in the first place — and print that.

CD: Powers did the illustrations for *The Stress Of Her Regard* himself — how did you and Tim come to that decision?

CHARNEL: Well, when he came to the concert, he brought some books for me, and while we were talking, he did some drawings in the books. He's good — he's not

Michael Whelan, but he's good. And . . . I just thought it would be interesting for his fans to see his interpretation of his characters.

Also, I wanted to give him an extra reason to let me publish the book, and I thought that he might be more inclined to let me do it if he could do the art as well.

CD: Perhaps your most renowned book to date is Ray Garton's *The New Neighbor*. How did you wind up publishing this book?

CHARNEL: Basically, I just asked him. It was a book that was turned

right away.

CD: When you published the book, your advertisements claimed it would be the only edition ever published — do you still believe that?

CHARNEL: Yeah, I believe it because . . . I offered to do a trade edition, but Ray and his agent wanted to keep it to just a limited edition. I think that they were a little scared of the book . . . in all of Ray's books that have come out since then, they always list all of his other titles, except they leave out

The New Neighbor. They don't really want to talk about the book. And his agent actually made him "soften" the book a bit. If you think the published edition is over the edge . . . when I got the original manuscript it was really nuts. But he softened it up before I pub-



lished it. down by virtually everybody — it was just too perverse. And it was a book that he'd had put away in a drawer for a while. When he told me about it, I said "it sounds like my kind of book, you better send it over." And it was (my kind of book).

And it was also a great vehicle for Potter (J.K. Potter, who did the artwork for the book). Potter's erotic work is among my favorites. People weren't even publishing (his erotic work) anymore; and when they did publish it, they censored it. I wanted Potter to do the art for *The New Neighbor*, and I sent him the manuscript and he said yes

lished it.

CD: It seems both Powers and Garton were writers that you admired before you chose to publish them. Do you choose the books that you publish based solely on personal preference, or do you consider their sales potential as well?

CHARNEL: No, I publish books by authors whose work I like. I don't want to throw money away (on publishing), but since it isn't my main business, it's okay if I'm not making a lot of money from it. I really want to make nice books.



That must sound farty, but it's true.

CD: Your books carry high price tags. You mentioned that you considered doing a trade edition of the Garton book—is there any chance that you'll publish less-expensive trade editions in the future?

CHARNEL: I'm glad I didn't do a trade edition of the Garton, and I don't plan on doing any trades in the future because I don't really want to deal with distributors. And . . . it's tough when you're sending out boxes of books to people, but they're not paying you on time, or at all. I got a call from a publisher just yesterday who was wondering how I was doing, because he looked over his books and found that he had something like \$21,000 dollars (in receivables). And he asked how I managed to avoid that situation, and I said "I just don't give them the chance." But when you do a trade edition, you *have* to (sell books on credit), and I just don't want to deal with

that.

So, no I'm not going to make less expensive books—in fact they seem to be going up in price, because I keep getting more exotic with materials and better printers and so forth. With Dean Koontz' *Beastchild* (the next title due from Charnel House), the binding materials are coming from Japan, and the end sheets are coming from Italy.

CD: Speaking of binding materials, tell us about the binding of your first Powers title, and specifically about your experience with dying the covers.

CHARNEL: My chiropractor could probably tell you better than me. I don't know why I bound the books that way, I just had a bug up my ass to see a book and slipcase done in streaked denim.

Basically, I bought a bolt of denim and had it shipped to the house. I cut it up in pieces, and I streaked it myself in the bathtub,

with bleach and water. And I would take them, in these huge bags, from there to the laundromat around the corner. I threw my back out doing it. It was a nightmare, although I'm glad I did it, because I think they turned out nice.

CD: Have you ever tried to do something unusual—in terms of publishing materials—that you haven't been able to pull off?

CHARNEL: I don't think I've tried anything too crazy yet; nothing that hasn't worked out. Let's see . . . we're binding the lettered edition of *Beastchild* in lizard skin, which should be interesting. The skin has scales, so it's a tough thing to do. The hero in *Beastchild* is an alien, and he has the skin of a lizard, so that's how it ties in.

Actually there was one other time . . . I probably shouldn't even mention this, but I used U.S. currency in the lettered edition of *Last Call*. We didn't really know before-

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Rare, lettered Charnel House editions of
(top) *The New Neighbor* and (bottom)
Last Call

hand if it would work, and my binder was a little bit worried because . . . you're not supposed to cut up money and paste it in a book. But I kind of talked him into it and told him that I would take the heat for it. So that was a little bit weird, but it worked out, because money is printed on strong paper and it worked well as an end sheet.

CD: How busy are you with your music career?

CHARNEL: I've always been busy with my music career. I mean, there are times when you don't tour, and you can't work all the time or you'll go crazy, but I've pretty much always been working. Books are a new love to me, but I've been playing music for twenty-five years. With *The Turtles* . . . we're out on the road maybe half the year, which gives me time to come home and do books as well.

CD: As you mentioned, your next title is scheduled to be a reprint of Dean Koontz' *Beastchild* — how did you acquire the rights to this book when Dean is selling reprint rights to many of his books for several million dollars?

CHARNEL: I gave him several million dollars. No, actually . . . he wrote the introduction for *Stress Of Her Regard*. We

met through that book, and he liked what I did, so I sent him a copy of the *Neighbor*, so he could see the quality of what we were doing. I think authors like to see their work printed in a lasting, esoteric edition if possible. So . . . I called him and asked him if there was anything he'd done in the past that's been out of print for a while and that he'd like to see in a limited edition, and he suggested *Beastchild*.

CD: I've heard that you were initially planning to publish a limited edition of Koontz' novel *Demon Seed*, but that he shelved that until he could update the computer technology from the original (twenty-year-old) manuscript.

CHARNEL: Yeah, that's on hold until he rewrites it. We'll still publish that, but he's so busy that . . . it's going to take a long time.

CD: I understand that you're also going to be publishing an omnibus edition of volumes one, two, and three of Joe Lansdale's *Drive-In* novels?

CHARNEL: Yeah, I'm real excited about that. A couple of years ago, I was talking to Joe at a convention and I said, "you know, you got us up in the air with books one and two — are you gonna bring us down?" And he said no, he didn't really want to deal with the *Drive-In* any longer. But then we talked some more and I said "look, if you'll write book three for me, and close the story out, I'll publish them all together in one book." And he thought that it was a great idea. So I commissioned book three, and I bought the rights to one and two. He's supposed to deliver book three by the end of the year, so that *could* be our next book after *Beastchild*.

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A HORROR WITHOUT LIMITS

DOUGLAS E. WINTER

Excerpts from a speech to the Annual Meeting of the Horror Writers of America, June 20, 1992.

Over the weekend, some of you may have heard, on the panels or over lunch or in the corridors, certain sentiments expressed about the sorry state of horror. Or predictions about its imminent death as a viable market. Yes, it's time once again for that rumbling and grumbling from editors and publishers about horror not selling well — and for writers to announce self-righteously that they are no longer writing horror.

With clockwork inevitability, there are those this year, like those last year — and the year before, and the decade before — for whom the cock has crowed, for whom the time has come to deny that which has earned them their livelihoods, their reputations . . . and to place all of the blame on its name.

A few months ago, the Academy Awards were held in Hollywood, with all of their usual glitter and excess. And this particular year, the Academy, in its infinite wisdom, saw fit to bestow a good-sized collection of its trophies upon a motion picture called *The Silence of the Lambs*. In a press conference immediately following the ceremonies, one of that film's stars, Jodie Foster, was asked just what she thought about a horror movie winning so many Oscars. And Ms. Foster replied, without

missing a step, that *The Silence of the Lambs* was not a horror film at all.

It was, she said, a psychological drama.

Now my immediate reaction was to say, well, gee whiz, Jodie, you've just been handed a golden statue for your alleged acting prowess — now what exactly was that emotion you were portraying in the climactic scene as Clarice Starling when you were hyperventilating your way through the abattoir of Buffalo Bill's basement?

Were you being . . . psychological?

But of course we all know what Jodie Foster meant in offering up her crude, but nevertheless effective, distinction. She was saying that her performance, her movie, was bigger than horror . . . and ergo, better. That *The Silence of the Lambs* is not one of those "horror movies": the slice and dice, let's-go-mutilate-the-teenagers-in-the-woods movies.

Yet think for a moment: What is the essential difference between *The Silence of the Lambs* and the *Friday the 13th* films? After all, both offer us psychopaths in face masks, dead girls and cannibalism. The symbology is much the same.

It's the attitude that is different.

And it is attitude I want to talk about for a moment.

It's convenient, comfortable and safe to think of horror as a small and clubby world that only

we understand. We can put the label on our books (Tor Horror, Dell Abyss) and on ourselves (the Horror Writers of America) with some certainty of our purpose. We can be "us" — and they can be "them."

Wrong.

The philosopher Georges Bataille wrote in *The Tears of Eros* of a "horror without limits." This was not a precursor of Clive Barker's well-known maxim — "There are no limits" — which challenges the notion of what respectably can be seen and shown in film and fiction. Bataille's words were instead an expression of an understanding, a fundamental truth, exposed by a brilliant philosopher as he worked feverishly — broken, frail, dying — on what was to be his final book.

What Bataille saw, after a lifetime devoted to the study and interpretation of the most ancient and modern artforms — from cave drawings to Chinese statuary, from ballads and poetry and painting to the literature of this century — was that we live in a world interpenetrated by horror. And that it is through art that men and women have evoked, captured, wrestled with that fundamental truth.

That there is a horror beyond good and evil — beyond love and fear, dark and light, black and white — certainly a horror beyond vampires and haunted houses and things that go bump in the night.

That we experience this horror most every day; it is life itself—this delicate journey on the knife-edge of knowing and not knowing, believing yet disbelieving.

It is the very act of living . . . of being alive.

And that those who explore this horror are the artists whose images will thrive, whose fiction will live for as long as we creatures walk this earth.

Now we can sit back comfortably and be the people who write and edit and publish the stories of vampires and haunted houses and the like—or we can embrace *horror* in all its incarnations, and make it ours.

This is a grave responsibility. And if we are so bold as to take on this title of Horror Writers of America, then we must be so bold as to embrace this word horror without flinching.

We agree that *The Silence of the*

Lamb is horror—we gave the novel one of these Bram Stoker Awards not so very long ago. But . . .

If Franz Kafka were alive today, would we be so bold as to nominate him for a Stoker Award? Could we put aside our own self-interest, our own cliques, our own friends, our own authors and nominate him? If Tomasso Landolfi were alive—would we be so bold as to recognize some of what he had written as horror? If Alain Robbe-Grillet should write another novel . . . might it find its way onto our Stoker list?

I would like to think so.

We must wear the badge of horror not as a symbol of what we are . . . but as a remembrance of this fiction's rich history—its essential humanity—and as a promise of what we could and should be: The writers and artists, editors and publishers, who are searching, forever searching, for the answer to this

mystery we call life—who are exploring this essential question . . . of horror.

Tonight, and next year, and the year after that, we gather to celebrate horror—not the Horror Writers of America, but *Horror*. We gather not to pat each other on the back, but to kick each other in the butt, and to say:

Go on out there and compete in the big leagues, the ones where Borges and Straub, Barth and Barker, and so many others are in play.

Write about a horror not as defined by a publisher, or a genre, or even by a writers' organization . . .

Certainly not a horror defined by a Hollywood starlet . . .

But a horror without limits.

For Peter Straub

Tekeli-li! If you think the name's strange... try reading it!

By any other name *Tekeli-III* (pronounced TEK-ah-LEE-LEE) is doing some pretty weird stuff. Subtitled a *Journal of Terror*, this quarterly features an eclectic mix of fiction, commentary, art, poetry, film reviews (and moviemaker interviews), comics and scholarship, all examining aspects of the horror genre usually overlooked by the mainstream magazines.

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HITCHIN' THROUGH THE WALL

AUGUSTINE FUNNELL

AUGUSTINE FUNNELL is a friendly writer from New Brunswick, Canada. His short fiction has appeared in many top magazines; the following story would have been right at home in the old *Twilight Zone*—enjoy!

He was getting Severely. Pissed. Off. For two hours he'd been standing here in the broiling sun, thumb stuck out as car after car rumbled past and disappeared over the hill a mile or so away. For the hundredth time he cursed the last driver to give him a ride, the one who'd turned off at this godforsaken crossing in the middle of nowhere, and then clunked down the unpaved country road.

Far back, around the corner that eventually led to this part of the highway, there came the steady rumble of an approaching car. He picked up his knapsack, slung it over his left shoulder, and assumed a posture of weary patience. It did no good to show them you were steamed, because they'd be afraid to pick you up; did no good to show you were dead tired and hungry, because they didn't care. They responded best to shoulders straight, thumb out at waist level, not too aggressive, respectful, submissive.

He had been hitchin' a long time.

The car came into view, a blue Pontiac, and when he saw there were no passengers, just the dark shadow of the driver's head above the headrest, his heart did a little dance of hope. It got closer — was it slowing? was the guy trying to get a good look at him? — and he extended his thumb, wiping the anger from his face, carefully assuming an expression of stoicism. For an instant he thought the Pontiac was decelerating, then there was the unmistakable sound of the engine revving a little higher, and the car shot past him, the driver barely looking his way.

He swore. Dropped his thumb disgustingly. Stared after the Pontiac. Spat on the sizzling asphalt. Swore again. He quinted to stare at the car's disappearing trunk as it climbed the hill. "*Bastard!*"

They didn't know what it was like. Couldn't, or

they wouldn't drive by and leave him roasting here. Must be Christians, he thought, because he was cynical and knew the story of the Good Samaritan, knew that one of the tenets of the Christian faith was charity, and that most people claimed adherence to that particular philosophy.

He'd love to find *them* standing on the roadside, he thought suddenly; tired, dirty, angry. See how *they* liked it when a car with room enough for five more roared past. But of course he wouldn't find them in that situation, never; he didn't have a car, probably never would, and they did, and *always* would.

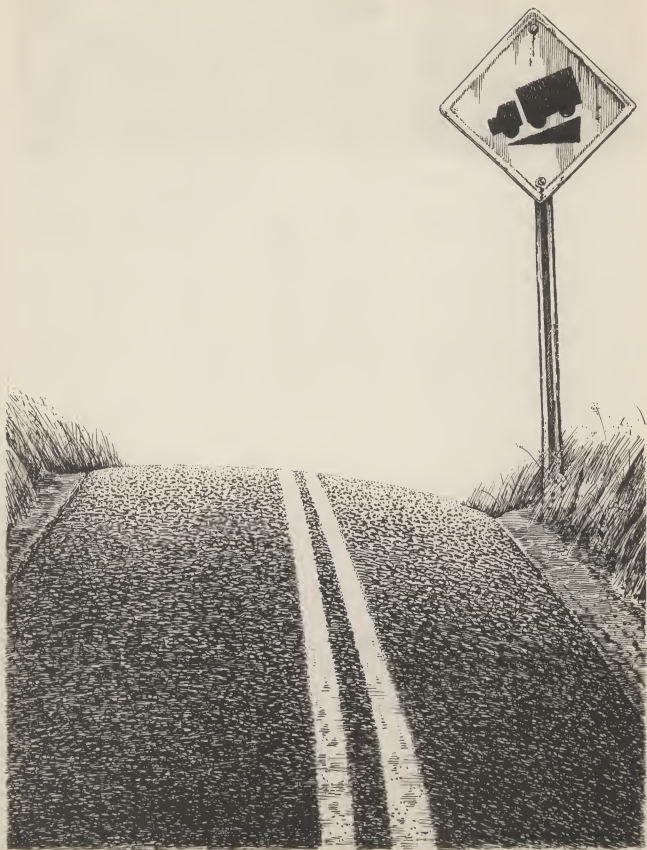
Still, they should know *something* of the frustration they caused him.

The car was just approaching the top of the hill when he smiled bitterly, imagining an invisible wall three feet thick at the very crest. And when the car reached the top he imagined it crashing against the unseen barrier, the driver coming to a bone-splintering impact, the front of the car nicely crushed back and perfectly flat.

Another car was approaching. He turned, assumed the position, and wished for a magic marker and a piece of cardboard on which to write, *Been here three hours. Please.* Okay, so it hadn't been three hours yet. Seemed like more. It balanced out.

This one, a Datsun, had a couple in it, empty back seat, but they passed him too, the woman on the passenger side staring in the other direction, pretending not to see. He dropped his arm in disgust again, turned with a fury the driver could not miss when he looked in his rearview mirror — they always did that, even when they tried to make it seem like they didn't — and shouted something obscene. Another one for the wall, then. And he pictured the unsuspecting driver, tooling along at sixty-five, crashing against the barrier, the car suddenly mangled and useless, blood and gasoline and engine coolant mingling in puddles on the road. Maybe an explosion; perhaps a fire. Death, certainly.

It became a game as the minutes ticked by and



vehicles left him standing, a game he couldn't lose because the drivers didn't know the wall was there. Never mind that somewhere deep inside he knew they drove over the crest of the hill and disappeared safely on the other side; in his mind he saw with vicious clarity their impacts, chunks of jagged metal exploding over the landscape, the shocked expressions on their faces during those last nanoseconds when they realized something utterly unspeakable had happened.

Gradually his two hours became the three he would have written on his sign, and the hilltop became littered with the carnage of Christians and their modern chariots. *Damn hill's a cemetery*, he thought, *cemetery and a junkyard*.

Even more gradually, the three hours became four.

He no longer slung the knapsack casually over his shoulder when he heard the cars coming; no longer thrust his shoulders back and plastered a half-smile of weariness across his face. But he saw the impact of the cars, saw the shattered wreckage of metal and flesh.

It was somewhere between the fourth and fifth hour when the Caddy came tooling into view, a brand new model, tinted windows, power everything, and a long time before it got to him he heard the beast slowing, slowing more, and finally grinding to a stop in the roadside gravel a few feet beyond. For almost five seconds he couldn't believe the car — *this* car, this monument to wealth — was stopping. The late afternoon sun glinted off the buffed paint, off the dark windows. He hoisted the knapsack and sprinted the few feet separating them; opened the door; got in; eased the knapsack into the back seat. The cool air was immediately soothing, refreshing.

The driver was middle-aged; three-piece suit; hair clipped short and stylish; gleaming fingernails, impeccably manicured. The antithesis of the driver who

picked up hitchhikers.

"Going far?"

"'Bout forty miles."

"You're in luck, then." He took his foot off the brake pedal, checked the rearview mirror, and eased back onto the highway.

Through the windshield the hitcher stared at the crest of the hill, the late afternoon heat still shimmering off its surface. He smiled when he thought of that wall he'd constructed up there, smiled again when the heat waves made it seem there were piles of junk and mangled bodies strewn about.

Wouldn't it be somethin', he thought, *if it turned out to be real? If this car smashed into it at — he checked the speedometer — sixty-five miles an hour, and spread a few globes of Cadillac junk all over the hillside?*

Of course it didn't happen. The Cadillac went sailing right through the invisible wall, the speedometer needle just hitting seventy. No problem at all. Straight through the wall that didn't exist.

The hitcher, though, didn't go along. The impact of first his knees, then his head against the wall sounded like an enormous melon dropped onto the cement from about fifty feet up. His body smashed half through the backrest on the passenger side, then followed the path of least resistance, up and over and out through the rear window in a shower of exploding glass. Tenth of a second. Tops.

When the bloodied driver finally got his vehicle under control, got his racing heart to slow so it wouldn't explode in his chest, he looked back and saw blood and meat and shattered bone the rough consistency of fresh raw hamburger trickling slowly through mid-air, down to the asphalt. Then his stomach rebelled, and he threw up all over the knapsack in the back seat.

— CD



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KATHRYN
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ANTHOLOGY ATTIC

Through the miracle of modern technology (read: a laptop computer) I am writing the first draft of this at MagiCon in Orlando the day before Labor Day, and I'm very busy for the next few days (trips to Universal Studios and the eagerly looked-for Gator Land among others, and then flying home on Thursday), and the day after I get back I have to run around and do all sorts of birthday party arrangement-type stuff, because the day after THAT is my husband's and my combined 90th birthday (yes, we were born on the same day, ten years apart; no, I won't tell you how old we are ... unless you send me \$1000 in unmarked bills and promise that you absolutely WON'T tell anyone else), and that's the 12th and this column is due the 15th and ... I'm running out of time.

I brought along an anthology (well, two, to be precise, but I only finished one) to read at the con, and I have been doing just that because I am a dutiful columnist, and certainly don't mind working during the only vacation I've had in well over a year and a half. Not at all. No way. Really. Thank God, my work and my entertainment overlap.

Which all boils down to one

thing: this column isn't as long as usual.

Just a reminder: Just because I don't mention a story doesn't mean I didn't like it (it *could* mean that, but you can't automatically assume that); I have length restraints that won't permit me to review every single story. And so onto the review.



Freak Show (F. Paul Wilson, editor; *Pocket Books*; 372 pages; \$5.50, ISBN 0-671-69574-6).

This is a shared world anthology. I love shared world anthologies, and frankly don't understand why there aren't more in the horror field. It would seem a place ripe for such things. SF and fantasy have shared worlds (*Thieves' World* springs immediately to mind), but horror? There are the four volumes of *Greystone Bay* (put out by *Tor Books*; the fourth volume *will* be published ... someday, I'm told). And that's about it. If we can have all these theme anthologies (vampires and zombies and obsessions and urban horror and werewolves and such), why can't we have a shared world? After all, that's a kind of theme. It's

true that shared worlds take a bit more work than your usual anthology: the editor has to establish a concept and from there a bible of sorts that tells the prospective writer about the place (or concept), and any other "rules". One nice aspect of shared worlds is that stories often overlap—incidents in one story might be referenced in another; characters from one or more stories might appear in others as secondary characters or mere walk-ons. What occurs then is the reader becomes caught up in this world. It becomes more real to her; characters become a trifle more three-dimensional.

So, c'mon, guys, let's get going with some *good* shared worlds for horror. I'm waitin'.

And speaking of hard work, it's very apparent that editor Wilson did more than his share for *Freak Show*, the second anthology "presented" by Horror Writers of America. Wilson has done more than just edit these stories. He starts the book with a section setting up the story of the Peabody-Ozymandias Traveling Circus and Oddity Emporium. A man named Oz Prather approaches Joseph Peabody and offers to combine his freak show with Peabody's faltering circus. Prather isn't a humani-

tarian; there's an ulterior motive, which becomes apparent as the tale unfolds. He is searching for the Pieces of a certain Device, a Device that he wants to use for ... well, I can't tell you *everything*, now can I?

The book begins at the circus's Florida winter quarters, and the tales follow the circus on its tour of the US: Okefenokee Swamp, GA; Athens, GA; Sikeston, MO; Leesville, LA; Bois D'Arc, TX; Palomita, NM; Venice, CA; La Canada, CA; Seattle, WA; Elm Haven, IL; Chicago, IL; Battle Creek, MI; Drood Hol-low, WV; Bird-in-Hand, PA; Rochester, NY; Quarry, MA; Oyster Bay, NY; The Pine Barrens, NJ. Some of these places are real; some aren't. The stories aren't titled; they're simply labeled with place and state name; the author's name appears at story's end. Between the entries Wilson weaves his own story of the circus and what is going on with Oz and his people, and it's as compelling as any of others.

As Wilson says in his intro, this isn't like other anthologies. The stories progress from one point to another, and so the reader should read the stories in the order they occur to get the full effect (and to understand what's going on in Wilson's inbetween story).

"Okefenokee Swamp, Georgia" by Brad Strickland, the story

of Claude Bledsoe ("the Alligator Boy") appealed to me greatly because I am rather partial to alligators these days; it's dark and nicely done. Nancy Kilpatrick has a solid tale in "Leesville, Louisiana," about Malaleik, the Dream Catcher and Ronee Sue, who joined the circus the previous month.

Scott A. Cupp's "Bois D'Arc, Texas" is the story of an important encounter between Señorita Gato, a furry young miss as it were, and

One of the amazing things about the anthology is that each freak stands out in his or her own way, and that few, if any, are stereotypes. The characters may well be freaks, but they are also *people*.

Frankly the only criticism I have for this anthology is the cover, which is particularly off-putting. It shows a distorted face (embossed no less) with raised type in a vomit-yellow color. I do not exaggerate. The cover is simply terrible. I

don't understand *Pocket's* reasoning on its choice; this may well discourage even the most diehard of fans from picking the book up (this is *not* a "buy me" cover), and you can well wonder what some non-horror reader might think. The book certainly deserved better.

Other contributors are Gregory Nicoll, Rex Miller, Kathryn

Ptacek, Morgan Fields, Richard Lee Byers, Yvonne Navarro, Steven Spruill, Lee Moler, Chet Williamson, Craig Shaw Gardner, Patrick Gates, Thomas F. Monteleone.

Highly recommended.



That's all for now. If you have some suggestions for older anthologies for review/survey, drop me a note (PO Box 97, Newton NJ 07860, or FAX: 201-579-6441). Keep reading.



The Pocket Books version of *Freak Show* (left) and the much more appealing hardcover edition from specialty publisher Borderlands Press



John Bob, an ex-rodeo cowboy. In "Venice, California" by Douglas Borton we meet Mr. Tane, who is blind, and Bowser, his best friend. Both stories are compelling, well-written stories with characters that the reader won't soon forget; these are two of my favorites.

Dan Simmons turns in a memorable story in "Elm Haven, Illinois" about the sorely afflicted Benjamin Willis Ashley-Montague. This ties, as a sort of sequel, to his novel *Summer of Night*, and is yet another tale the reader won't soon forget.

THE WASHINGTONIANS

BENTLEY LITTLE

BENTLEY LITTLE is very well-known in the horror community. In addition to several fine novels and dozens of shocking short stories, he has appeared in *Cemetery Dance* a half-dozen times or so. His latest novel, *Death Instinct*, was published under the pen-name Phillip Emmons.



*I will Skin your Children and Eat Them.
Upon Finishing, I will Fashion Utensils of Their Bones.*

"It's authentic," Davis admitted. "It was written by George Washington." He flipped off the light and with gloved fingers removed the parchment manuscript from underneath the magnifier. He shook his head. "Where did you get this? I've never come across anything like it in all my years in the business."

Mike shook his head. "I told you. It was in a trunk of my great grandmother's stuff that we found hidden in her barn."

"May I ask what you intend to do with it?"

"Well, if it was authentic, we were thinking we'd donate it to the Smithsonian or something. Or sell it to the Smithsonian. If we could. What's the appraisal value of something like this?"

Davis spread his hands in an expansive gesture. "It's invaluable."

"A ballpark figure."

He leaned forward, across the counter. "I'm not sure you realize what you have here, Mr. Franks. With this one sheet of paper, you can entirely rewrite the history of our country." He paused, letting his words sink in. "History is myth, Mr. Franks. It's not just a collection of names and dates and facts. It's a belief system that ultimately tells more about the people buying into it than it does about the historical participants. What do we retain from our school lessons about George Washington? About Abraham Lincoln? Impressions. Washington was the father of our country. Lincoln freed the slaves. We are who we are as a nation because of what we believe they were. This

letter will shatter that belief system and will forever change the image we have of Washington and perhaps all our Founding Fathers. That's a huge responsibility, and I think you should think about it."

"Think about it?"

"Decide if you want to make this knowledge known."

Mike stared at him. "Cover it up? Why? If it's true, then people should know."

"People don't want truth. They want image."

"Yeah, right. How much do I owe you?"

"The appraisal fee is fifty dollars." Davis started to write out a receipt, then paused, looked up. "I know a collector," he said. "He's had feelers out for something of this nature for a very long time. Would you mind if I gave him a ring? He's very discreet and very powerful and, I have reason to believe, very generous."

"No thanks."

"I'd call him for you, set up all the—"

"Not interested," Mike said.

"Very well." Davis returned to the receipt. He finished writing, tore the perforated edge of the paper, handed Mike a copy. "But if I may, Mr. Franks, I'd like to suggest you do something."

"What's that?"

"Sleep on it."

Mike took the receipt.

He thought about Washington's letter all the way home. It was resting on the passenger seat beside him, in a protective plastic sleeve that Davis had given him, and he could see it in his peripheral vision, dully reflecting the sun each time he turned north. It felt strange owning something so valuable. He had never had anything this rare in his car before, and it carried with it a lot of responsibility. It made him nervous. He probably should've had it insured or something before taking it anywhere. What if the car crashed? What if the parchment burned? His hands on the wheel were sweaty.

But that wasn't why his hands were sweaty. That wasn't why he was really nervous. No. That was part of it, but the real reason was the note itself.

I will Skin your Children and Eat Them.

The fact that the words had been written by a real person and not someone in a novel would have automatically made him uneasy. But the fact that they had been written by George Washington . . . Well, that was just too hard to take. There was something creepy about that, something that made a ripple of gooseflesh crawl up the back of his neck each time he looked at the plastic-wrapped brown parchment. He should have felt excited, proud, but instead he felt dirty, oily. He suddenly wished he'd never seen the note.

Ahead of him on a billboard above a liquor store, a caricature of George Washington — green, the way he appeared on the dollar bill — was winking at him, promoting the high T-bill rate at the Bank of New York.

He looked away from the sign, turned down Lincoln Avenue toward home.

Mike paced up and down the length of the kitchen. "He implied that rather than give it to the Smithsonian or something, I should sell it to a private

collector who would keep it a secret."

Pam looked up from the dishes, shook her head. "That's crazy."

"That's what I said."

"Well don't get too stressed out over it—"

"I'm not getting stressed out."

"Will you let me finish my sentence? I was just going to say, there are a lot of other document appraisers, a lot of museum curators, a lot of university professors. There are a lot of people you can take this to who will know what to do with it."

He nodded, touched her arm. "You're right. I'm sorry. It's just . . . I don't know. This whole thing has me a little freaked."

"Me too. This afternoon, I was helping Amy with her homework. They're studying Johnny Appleseed and George Washington and the cherry tree."

"Two myths."

"There's a picture of Washington in her school book . . ." She shivered, dipped her hands back into the soap suds. "You ought to look at it. It'll give you the willies."

He smiled at her. "I could give you my willie."

"Later."

"Really creepy, huh?"

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Lucius Shepard, from the *Introduction*

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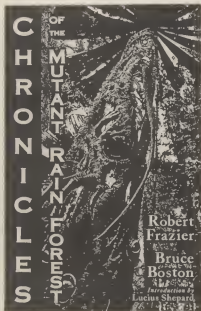
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"Check it out for yourself."

"I will. You need me in here?"

"No."

He patted the seat of her jeans, gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. "I'll be out front, then."

"All right. I'll be through here in a minute. Go over Amy's math homework, too. Doublecheck."

"Okay." He walked into the living room. Amy was lying on the floor watching a rerun of "Mr. Belvedere." Her school book and homework were on the coffee table. He sat down on the couch and was about to pick up the book, when he saw the cover: mountains and clouds and a clipper ship and the Statue of Liberty and the Liberty Bell. The cover was drawn simply, in bright grade school colors, but there was something about the smile on the Statue of Liberty's face that made him realize he did not want to open up the book to see the picture of George Washington.

A commercial came on, and Amy turned around to look at him. "Are you going to check my homework?" she asked.

He nodded. "Yes," he said.

"Do it quick, then. I'm watching TV."

He smiled at her. "Yes, boss."

The pounding woke them up.

It must have been going on for some time, because Amy was standing in the doorway of their bedroom, clutching her teddy bear though she'd supposedly given up the bear two years ago.

Pam gave him a look that let him know how frightened she was, that told him to go out to the living room and find out who the hell was beating on their front door at this time of night, then she was no longer Wife but Mom, and she was out of bed and striding purposefully toward their daughter, telling her in a calm, reasonable, adult voice to go back to bed, there was nothing the matter.

Mike quickly reached down for the jeans he'd abandoned on the floor next to the bed and put them on. The pounding continued, unabated, and he felt more than a little frightened himself. But he was Husband and Dad and this was one of those things Husbands and Dads had to do, and he strode quickly out to the living room with a walk and an attitude that made him seem much braver than he actually felt.

He slowed down as he walked across the dark living room toward the entryway. Out here, the pounding seemed much louder and much . . . scarier. There was a strength and will behind the pounding that had not translated across the rooms to the rear of the house and he found himself thinking, absurdly, that whatever was knocking on the door was not human. It was a stupid thought, an irrational thought,

but he stopped at the edge of the entryway nevertheless. The door was solid, there was no window in it, not even a peephole, and he did not want to just open it without knowing who—

what

—was on the other side.

He moved quickly over to the front window. He didn't want to pull the drapes open and draw attention to himself, but he wanted to get a peek at the pouncer. There was a small slit where the two halves of the drapes met in the middle of the window, and he bent over to peek through the opening.

Outside on the porch, facing the door, were four men wearing white powdered wigs and satin Colonial garb.

He thought for a second that he was dreaming. The surrealistic irrationality of this seemed more nightmarish than real. But he saw one of the men pound loudly on the door with his bunched fist, and from the back of the house he heard the muffled sound of Pam's voice as she comforted Amy, and he knew that this was really happening.

He should open the door, he knew. He should confront these people. But something about that bunched fist and the look of angry determination on the pounder's face made him hesitate. He was frightened, he realized. More frightened than he had been before he'd peeked through the curtains, when he'd still half-thought there might be a monster outside. These weirdos were connected somehow to Washington's note.

I will Skin your Children and Eat Them.

He knew that instinctively. And that was what scared him.

He heard Pam hurrying across the living room toward him, obviously alarmed by the fact that the pounding had not yet stopped. She moved quickly next to him. "Who is it?" she whispered.

He shook his head. "I don't know."

He peeked again through the split in the curtains, studying the strangers more carefully. She pressed her face next to his. He heard her gasp, felt her pull away. "Jesus," she whispered. There was fear in her voice. "Look at their teeth."

Their teeth? He focused his attention on the men's mouths. Pam was right. There was something strange about their teeth. He squinted, looked closer.

Their teeth were uniformly yellow.

Their teeth were false.

George Washington had false teeth.

He backed away from the window. "Call the police," he told Pam. "Now."

"We want the letter!" The voice was strong, filled with an anger and hatred he had not expected. The pounding stopped. "We know you have it, Franks!

Give it to us and we will not harm you!"

Mike looked again through the parted curtains. The colonially dressed men, all four of them, were facing the window, staring at him. In the porchlight their skin looked pale, almost corpse-like, their eyes brightly fanatic. The man who had been pounding on the door pointed at him. Rage twisted the features of his face. "Give us the letter!"

He wanted to move away, to hide, but Mike forced himself to hold his ground. He was not sure if the men could actually see him through the small slit, but he assumed they could. "I called the police!" he yelled. "They'll be here any minute!"

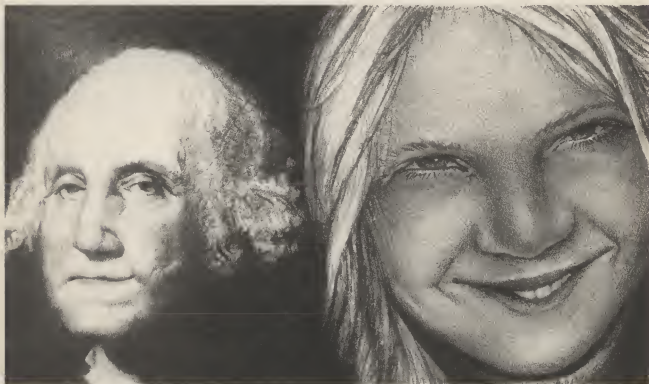
The pounder was about to say something, but at

He nodded as she moved off, but even as he headed toward the phone, he knew with a strange fatalistic certainty that the police would not be able to track down these people, that when these people came back — and they *would* come back — the police would not be able to protect him and his family.

He heard a car engine roar to life, heard tires squealing on the street.

He picked up the phone and dialed "911."

He left Pam and Amy home the next morning, told them not to answer the door or the telephone, and to call the police if they saw any strangers hanging



that second fate stepped in and there was the sound of a siren coming from somewhere to the east. The men looked confusedly at each other, spoke lowly and quickly between themselves, then began hurrying off the porch. On their arms, Mike saw round silk patches with stylized insignias.

A hatchet and a cherry tree.

"We will be back for you!" one of the men said.

"You can't escape!"

"Mom!" Amy called from her bedroom.

"Go get her," Mike said.

"You call the police then."

around the neighborhood. He had formulated a plan during the long sleepless hours between the cops' departure and dawn, and he drove to NYU, asking a fresh-faced clerk in Administration where the History department was located and following the kid's directions across campus, reading the posted signs until he found the correct building.

The secretary of the History department informed him that Dr. Hartkinson had his office hours from eight to ten-thirty and was available to speak with him, and he followed her down the hallway to the professor's office.



Hartkinson stood upon introduction, shook his hand. He was an elderly man in his mid to late sixties, with the short stature, spectacles and whiskers of a Disney movie college professor. "Have a seat," the old man said, clearing a stack of papers from an old straight-backed chair. He thanked the secretary, who retreated down the hall, then moved back behind his oversized desk and sat down himself. "What can I do for you?"

Mike cleared his throat nervously. "I don't really know how to bring this up. It may sound kind of stupid to you, but last night my wife and I were . . . Well, we were sleeping, and we were woken up by this pounding on our front door. I went out to investigate, and there were these four men on my porch, calling out my name and threatening me. They were wearing powdered wigs and what looked like Revolutionary War clothes."

The old man's eyes widened. "Washingtonians!" "Washingtonians?"

"Shh!" The professor quickly stood and closed his office door. His relaxed, easygoing manner no longer seemed so relaxed and easygoing. There was a tenseness in his movements, urgency in his walk. He sat immediately back down, took the phone off the hook, pulled closed his lone window. He leaned conspiratorially across the desk, and when he spoke his voice was low and frightened. "You're lucky you came to me," he said. "They have spies everywhere."

"What?"

"Dr. Gluck and Dr. Cannon, in our History department here, are Washingtonians. Most of the other professors are sympathizers. It's pure luck you talked to me first. What do you have?"

"What?"

"Come on now. They wouldn't have come after you unless you had something they wanted. What is it? A letter?"

Mike nodded dumbly.

"I thought so. What did this letter say?"

Mike reached into his coat pocket and pulled out the piece of parchment.

The professor took the note out of the plastic. He nodded when he'd finished reading. "The truth. That's what's in this letter."

Mike nodded.

"George Washington was a cannibal. He was a fiend and a murderer and a child eater. But he was also chosen to be the Father of our Country, and that image is more important than the actuality."

"Someone else told me that."

"He was right." The professor shifted in his seat. "Let me tell you something about historians. Historians, for the most part, are not interested in truth. They are not interested in learning facts and teaching people what really happened. They want to perpetuate the

lies they are sworn to defend. It's an exclusive club, the people who know why our wars were really fought, what really happened behind the closed doors of our world's leaders, and most of them want to keep it that way. There are a few of us altruists, people like myself who got into this business to learn and share our learning. But the majority of historians are PR people for the past." He thought for a moment. "Benjamin Franklin did not exist. Did you know that? He never lived. He was a composite character created for mass consumption. It was felt by the historians that a character was needed who would embody America's scientific curiosity, boldness of vision and farsighted determination, who would inspire people to reach for greatness in intellectual endeavors. So they came up with Franklin, an avuncular American Renaissance man. Americans wanted to believe in Franklin, wanted to believe that his qualities were their qualities, and they bought into the concept lock, stock and barrel, even falling for that absurd kite story."

"It was the same with Washington. Americans wanted him to be the father of our country, needed him to be the father of our country, and they were only too happy to believe what we historians told them."

Mike stared at Hartkinson, then looked away, toward the rows of history books on the professor's shelves. These were the men who had really determined our country's course, he realized. The historians. They had altered the past and affected the future. It was not the great men who shaped the world, it was the men who *told* of the great men who shaped the world.

"You've stumbled upon something here," Hartkinson said. "And that's why they're after you. That note's like a leak from Nixon's White House, and the President's going to do everything in his power to make damn sure it goes no farther than you. Like I said, the history biz isn't anything like it appears on the outside. It's a weird world in here, weird and secretive. And the Washingtonians . . ." He shook his head. "They're the fringe of the fringe. And they are a very dangerous group indeed."

"They all had wooden teeth, the ones who came to my house—"

"Ivory, not wood. That's one of those little pieces of trivia they're very adamant about getting out to the public. The original core group of Washingtonians screwed up on that one, and subsequent generations have felt that the impression that was created made Washington out to be a weak buffoon. They've had a hard time erasing that 'wooden teeth' image, though."

"Is that how you can spot them? Their teeth?"

"No. They wear modern dentures when they're not in uniform. They're like the Klan in that respect."

"Only in that respect?"

The professor met his eyes. "No."
"What . . ." He cleared his throat. "What will they try to do to me?"

"Kill you. And eat you."

Mike stood. "Jesus fucking Christ. I'm going to the police with this. I'm not going to let them terrorize my family—"

"Now just hold your horses there. That's what they'll try to do to you. If you listen to me, and if you do exactly what I say, they won't succeed." He looked at Mike, tried unsuccessfully to smile. "I'm going to help you. but you'll have to tell me a few things first. Do you have any children? Any daughters?"

"Yes. Amy."

"This is kind of awkward. Is she . . . a virgin?"

"She's ten years old!"

The professor frowned. "That's not good."

"Why isn't it good?"

"Have you seen the insignia they wear on their arms?"

"The hatchet and the cherry tree?"

"Yes."

"What about it?"

"That was Professor Summerlin's contribution. The Washingtonians have always interpreted the cherry tree story as a cannibal allegory, a metaphoric retelling of Washington's discovery of the joys of killing people and eating their flesh. To take it a step further, Washington's fondness for the meat of virgins is well-documented, and that's what made Professor Summerlin think of the patch. He simply updated the symbol to include the modern colloquial definition of 'cherry.'"

Mike understood what Hartkinson meant, and he felt sick to his stomach.

"They all like virgin meat," the professor said.

"I'm going to the police. Thanks for your help and all, but I don't think you can—"

The door to the office was suddenly thrown open, and they stood there: four men and one woman dressed in Revolutionary garb. Mike saw yellowish teeth in smiling mouths.

"You should have known better, Julius," the tallest man said, pushing his way into the room.

"Run!" Hartkinson yelled.

Mike tried to, making a full-bore, straight-ahead dash toward the door, but he was stopped by the line of unmoving Washingtonians. He'd thought he'd be able to break through, to knock a few of them over and take off down the hall, but evidently they had expected that and were prepared.

Two of the men grabbed Mike, held him.

"My wife'll call the police if I'm not back in time."

"Who cares?" the tall man said.

"They'll publish it!" Mike yelled in desperation.

"I gave orders for them to publish the letter if anything happened to me! If I was even late!"

The woman looked at him calmly. "No you didn't."

"Yes I did. My wife'll—"

"We have your wife," she said.

A stab of terror flashed through him.

She smiled at him, nodded. "And your daughter."

He was not sure where they were taking him, but wherever it was, it was far. Although he was struggling as they hustled him out of the building and into their van, no one tried to help him or tried to stop them. A few onlookers smiled indulgently, as though they were witnessing the rehearsal of a play or a staged publicity stunt, but that was the extent of the attention they received.

If only they hadn't been wearing those damn costumes, Mike thought. His abduction wouldn't have looked so comical if they'd been dressed in terrorist attire.

He was thrown into the rear of the van, the door was slammed shut, and a few seconds later the engine roared to life and they were off.

They drove for hours. There were no windows in the back of the van, and he could not tell in which direction they were travelling, but after a series of initial stops and starts and turns, the route straightened out, the speed became constant, and he assumed they were moving along a highway.

When the van finally stopped and the back door was opened and he was dragged out, it was in the country, in a wooded, meadowed area that was unfamiliar to him. Through the trees he saw a building, a white, green-trimmed colonial structure that he almost but not quite recognized. The Washingtonians led him away from the building to a small shed. The shed door was opened, and he saw a dark tunnel and a series of steps leading down. Two of the Washingtonians went before him, the other three remained behind him, and in a group they descended the stairway.

Mt. Vernon, he thought. The building was Mt. Vernon, George Washington's home.

The steps ended at a tunnel, which wound back in the direction of the building and ended in a large warehouse-sized basement that looked like it had been converted into a museum of the Inquisition. They were underneath Mt. Vernon, he assumed, in what must have been Washington's secret lair.

"Where's Pam?" he demanded. "Where's Amy?"

"You'll see them," the woman said.

The tall man walked over to a cabinet, pointed at the dull ivory objects inside. "These are spoons carved

entirely from the femurs of the First Continental Congress." He gestured toward an expensively framed painting hanging above the cabinet. The painting, obviously done by one of early America's finer artists, depicted a blood-spattered George Washington, flanked by two naked and equally blood-spattered women, devouring a screaming man. "Washington commissioned this while he was president."

The man seemed eager to show off the room's possessions, and Mike wondered if he could use that somehow to get an edge, to aid in an escape attempt. He was still being held tightly by two of the Washingtonians, and though he had not tried breaking out of their grip since entering the basement, he knew he would not be able to do so.

The tall man continued to stare reverently at the painting. "He acquired the taste during the winter when he and his men were starving and without supplies or reinforcements. The army began to eat its dead, and Washington found that he liked the taste. During the long days, he carved eating utensils and small good luck fetishes from the bones of the devoured men. Even after supplies began arriving, he continued to kill a man a day for his meals."

"He began to realize that with the army in his control, he was in a position to call the shots," the woman explained from behind him. "He could create a country of cannibals. A nation celebrating and dedicated to the eating of human flesh!"

Mike turned his head, looked at her. "He didn't do it, though, did he?" He shook his head. "You people are so full of crap."

"You won't think so when we eat your daughter's kidneys."

Anger coursed through him and Mike tried to jerk out of his captors' grasps. The men's grips tightened, and he soon gave up, slumping back in defeat.

The tall man ran a hand lovingly over the top of a strange table-like contraption in the middle of the room. "This is where John Hancock was flayed alive," he said. "His blood anointed this wood. His screams sang in these chambers."

"You're full of shit."

"Am I?" He looked dreamily around the room. "Jefferson gave his life for us, you know. Sacrificed himself right here, allowed Washingtonians to rip him apart with their teeth. Franklin donated his body to us after death—"

"There was no Benjamin Franklin."

The man smiled, showing overly white teeth. "So you know."

"Shouldn't you be wearing your wooden chop-pers?"

The man punched him in the stomach, and Mike doubled over, pain flaring in his abdomen, his lungs

suddenly unable to draw in enough breath.

"You are not a guest," the man said. "You are a prisoner. Our prisoner. For now." He smiled. "Later you may be supper."

Mike closed his eyes, tried not to vomit. When he could again breathe normally, he looked up at the man. "Why this James Bond shit? You going to give me your whole fucking history before you kill me? You going to explain all of your toys to me and hope I admire them? Fuck you! Eat me you sick assholes!"

The woman grinned. "Don't worry. We will."

A door opened at the opposite end of the room, and Pam and Amy were herded in by three new Washingtonians. Both looked white and frightened. Amy was crying, and she cried even harder when she saw him. "Daddy!" she screamed.

"Lunch," the tall man said. "Start up the barbecue."

The Washingtonians laughed.

The woman turned to Mike. "Give us the letter," she said.

"And you'll let me go? Yeah. Right."

Where was the letter? he wondered. Hartkinson had had it last. Had he destroyed it or ditched it somewhere, like a junkie flushing drugs down the toilet after the arrival of the cops?

And where was Hartkinson? Why hadn't they kidnapped him too?

He was about to ask just that question when there was the sound of scuffling from the door through which Pam and Amy had entered. All of the Washingtonians turned to face that direction.

And there was Hartkinson.

He was dressed in a red British Revolutionary War uniform, and behind him stood a group of other redcoats clutching bayonets. A confused and frightened youth, who looked like a tour guide, peered into the room from behind them.

"Unhand those civilians!" Hartkinson demanded in an affected British accent.

He and his friends looked comical in their shabby mismatched British uniforms, but they also looked heroic, and Mike's adrenalin started pumping as they burst through the doorway. There were a lot of them, he saw, fifteen or twenty, and they outnumbered the Washingtonians more than two to one.

"Yeah!" he wanted to yell. "Kick ass!" But Amy was there, and he didn't want to say that in front of her.

Stupid, he thought. Why was he worried about something like that at a time like this?

Two of the Washingtonians drew knives and ran toward Pam and Amy.

"No!" Mike yelled.

Bullets cut the men down in mid-stride.

Mike took a chance and tried his escape tactic again. Either the men holding him were distracted or their grip had simply weakened after all this time, but he successfully jerked out of their hands, broke away and turned and kicked one of the men hard in the balls. The other man moved quickly out of his way, but he didn't care and ran across the room, past arcane torture devices, to Pam and Amy.

"Attack!" someone yelled.

The fight began.

It was mercifully short. Mike heard gunfire, heard ricochets, heard screams, saw movement, but he kept his head low and knew nothing of the specifics of what was happening. All he knew was that by the time he reached Pam and Amy they were free. He stood up from his crouch, looked around the room and saw instantly that most of the Washingtonians were dead or captured. The tall man was lying on the floor with a dark crimson stain spreading across his powder blue uniform, and that made Mike feel good. Served the bastard right.

Both Pam and Amy were hugging each other and crying, and he hugged them too and found that he was crying as well. He felt a light tap on his shoulder and instinctively whirled around, fists clenched, but it was only Hartkinson.

Mike stared at him for a moment, blinked. "Thank you," he said, and he began crying anew, tears of relief. "Thank you."

The professor nodded, smiled. There were flecks of blood in his white Disney beard. "Leave," he said.

"You don't want to see what comes next."

"But—"

His voice was gentle. "The Washingtonians aren't the only ones with . . . different traditions."

"You're not cannibals too?"

"No, but . . ." He shook his head. "You'd better go."

Mike looked at Pam and Amy, nodded.

From inside his red coat, Hartkinson withdrew a piece of parchment wrapped in plastic.

The letter.

"Take it to the Smithsonian. Tell the world." His voice was low and filled with reverence. "It's *history*."

"Are you going to be okay here?"

"We've done this before." He gestured toward the tour guide, who was still standing in the corner. "He'll show you the way out." He shook his head, smiled ruefully. "The history biz is not like it appears from the outside."

"I guess not." Mike put his arm around Pam, who in turn pulled Amy toward the door. The tour guide, white-faced, started slowly up the steps.

"Don't look back," Hartkinson advised.

Mike waved his acquiescence and began walking up the stairs, clutching Washington's letter. Behind them, he heard screams — cries of terror, cries of pain — and though he didn't want to, though he knew he shouldn't, he smiled as he led his family out of the basement and into Washington's home above.

— CD

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Last issue I consumed nearly an entire column blathering about the enjoyable, Milan-based *Dylan Dog Horror Fest*. This time I'd love to follow up and detail the friendly visit two key *Dylan Dog* personnel (Loris Curci and Maria Teresa Rinaldi) recently undertook to *La Casa Pescado*, I and my wife Sherri's house.

But Stephen King has contributed an 11,000 word novella to this issue of *Cemetery Dance*. That takes up a lot of space. And editor Rich Chizmar has threatened to pass an industrial-strength magnet over my collection of Japanese porno tapes if I don't keep this column short.

So herewith a stripped-down *Rough Cuts*. Too bad I'm pressed for space; there's a veritable media blizzard here. We've got your basic video reviews, the continuation of my recommended fanzine list, capsule comments on pricey laserdiscs featuring second-rate prints, and a quick peek at Ted Turner's TNT Network. Plus Tim Lucas' excellent *Video Watchdog Book*, as well as more Chinese horror films!

Sort of feels like sitting down to a fast-food Thanksgiving feast, doesn't it?

VIDEO REVIEWS

Something Weird

Something Weird Video is run by Mike Vraney, a friendly, knowledgeable film buff offering good-looking transfers at reasonable prices. His tapes are packaged in colorful boxes, too. Last month I obtained tons of excellent material from *Something Weird*, whose inventory is expanding all the time. These gems included "lost" Chinese horror films, grisly public service compilations and soft-core Sixties porn. Herewith the cream of that crop, which can be ordered from: *Something Weird Video*, c/o Mike Vraney, P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, WA 98133. (206)361-3759.

The Bloody, The Beautiful, and The Bare - (1966) **1/2, *Horror/Sex*, Directed by Sande N. Johnsen, With: Jack Lowe, Brad Scott. Color, 64 minutes (*Something Weird Video*)

A short, early gore film unlisted in any reference book. Plot concerns a serious artist whose detour into nude photography leads to murder. Obviously obscure, but, due to its time period and unexpectedly graphic climax, just as obviously of historical import. This video was reportedly struck from *Bare*'s only print.

Daughter of Horror (aka *Dementia*) - (1955) ***, *Horror/Crime/Art Film*, Directed by John Parker, With: Adrienne Barret, Bruno Ve Sota, Angelo Rossito, Ed McMahon. B&W, 55 minutes (*Something Weird Video*)

An obscure but memorable expressionistic horror film, *Daughter of Horror* resembles (but predates) everything from *Psycho* to *Carnival of Souls* to the 70's Italian giallo films.

Daughter's "plot" follows an hysterical young woman's journey through a nightmarish evening. During this trip she cuts off the hand of a repulsive fat man, sees drunken husbands abusing their wives (as well as cops beating winos), and eventually visits a nightclub, where Shorty Rogers and His Musical Giants blast hot jazz to a roomful of hipsters. *Daughter* concludes when the young woman suddenly awakens in a seedy hotel room. Thinking it was all a dream, she pulls open a dresser drawer. . . to find a severed hand, clutching a necklace.

Wildly experimental, chockful of Freudian/hallucinatory imagery, *Daughter of Horror* has no dialogue. It was shot MOS (mit out sound) in 1953 by writer/director John Parker, who never made another film. First released in 1955 as *Dementia*, it quickly died at the

box office but later resurfaced with a title change and a "horror host" narration by a young Ed McMahon, who denies his involvement to this day.

Interestingly, *Daughter of Horror* had become a cult oddity as early as 1958—this is the black-and-white film the teenagers are watching just before the original *Blob* invades the movie theatre. Sonically speaking, *Daughter of Horror* also boasts a haunting score and bizarre vocals by Marni Nixon, who later dubbed Natalie Wood's singing voice in *West Side Story*.

Despite its cinematic idiosyncracies, though, *Daughter of Horror*'s primary importance is thematic; this is the original urban nightmare.

Lots of companies offer bad dubs of *Daughter of Horror*, by the way. But *Something Weird* has the best quality video. In fact, they recently struck off even better tapes from a superior 16mm print. Customers who bought earlier copies of *Daughter of Horror* from *Something Weird* can mail in their old videos (which came in a black and white box) and receive the upgraded version free of charge. All *Something Weird* owner Mike Vraney asks is that you call him first.

*Hey Folks! — It's Intermission Time! (1950-1970), ***, Promo Films, Directed by: Various, With: Many unknowns. B&W/Color, 81 minutes, (Something Weird)*

Remember those short films theaters and drive-ins used to run between movies back in the good old days of the double feature? You know, the ones screaming "IT'S REFRESHMENT TIME!" — before flashing an image of a greasy greenish pizza?

Well, *Something Weird* has come up with a nostalgic, terrific-looking compilation tape featuring food ads and more. There are anti-Pay-TV spots, commercials for local merchants, ten-minute

countdowns to the next feature, clips for the snack bar and warnings not to steal your drive-in speaker. Even ads for PIC (that foul-smelling little coil you lit to keep mosquitoes out of your car) are included!

This hour-and-a-half tape covers two decades worth of intermission spots, from roughly 1950 to 1970. It's the perfect video wallpaper. But be warned — *Intermission Time* is hypnotic. Sherri and I popped in this tape for a quick peek; next thing we knew, we'd spent an hour eyeballing foaming cups of Pepsi!

*Highway Safety Films — (1959-1970), **1/2, "Real-Life" Horror, Directed by: Dick Wyman, With: Lots of Dead People and Stiff-Looking Cops. Color, 110 minutes, (Something Weird Video)*

During the Sixties and Seventies, high schoolers used to be subjected to something called "Driver's Ed." classes. While those courses were ostensibly designed to teach students safe driving habits, they really were nothing more than an excuse for teachers to thread up 16mm projectors and screen the most grainy, godawful "highway death" films. That's right; long before *Faces of Death*, teenagers were being shown graphic footage of dozens of crushed, charred, and decapitated motorists. All for real, and all in — er — living color.

I'm not sure if these gory films ever made anyone drive safer (probably not), but they sure left their mark on impressionable kids (this one included). Now *Something Weird* has compiled four of these *Highway Safety* films onto one tape. The first is 1959's "Signal 30" (the Ohio State Highway Patrol's code for fatal crash). 30" was directed by Dick Wyman, a still photographer from Mansfield, Ohio, who'd lost a friend in a traffic accident. The remaining three *High-*

way Safety films — "Mechanized Death," "Wheels of Tragedy," and "Highway of Agony" — were made by Earl J. Deems, Wyman's accountant.

Here's Wyman's and Deems' story.

Dick Wyman made "Signal 30" out of a desire to prevent further loss of life. Hitching a ride to crash sites with local ambulances, Wyman used 16mm equipment to shoot actual auto fatalities in and around Mansfield. In the process he gruesomely illustrated the dangers of ignoring railroad crossing, stop signs, etc.

However, Wyman had trouble distributing "Signal 30." So he later sold the "30" rights to Earl Deems, who'd decided to get into the Highway Safety Film business himself. Deems then enlisted the aid of the Ohio State Highway Patrol to act as sponsors and performers in his own crude but undeniably powerful shorts. And Deems really did make a living off this grisly subgenre; during the Sixties and Seventies, he released 19 Highway Safety Films, ones which eventually found their way around the country to various schools and civic groups.

Enough history—what are the films themselves like? In two words, gruesome and ugly. Yet weirdly enough, it wasn't *Highway Safety*'s bloody bodies that I found offensive. What's offputting are the strident, hypermoralistic voice-overs, which keep repeating lines like "ANOTHER motorist who thought he was too good for the law!", as the camera lingers over some poor soul's crispy corpse. The sheer relish, the incredibly pompous satisfaction that went into these narrations has to be heard to be believed. Ick!

*The Killer Snakes — (1972/Chinase), **1/2, Horror/Sex, Directed by: Kuei Chi-Hung, With: Kan Kuo-Liang, Li Lin-Lin, Chen Chun.*

Color, (Something Weird Video)

Here's another find, a lost Chinese horror film which played a few drive-ins in the early 70's and then promptly dropped out of sight. Try to find this one in your reference books!

In the first ten minutes, *Killer* shows a (live) snake having its gall bladder removed and emptied into a sweaty businessman's cup of whiskey. He promptly drinks the inky bile with lip-smackin' relish. Then we meet our "hero," a dim-witted handyman who fantasizes about whipping bound-and-naked Chinese women while he's screwing a half-full bottle of milk(!). Eventually the story kicks in; it's something to do with the handyman making pets out of deadly reptiles and sending them after his enemies (ala *Stanley*, also released in '72).

Sadly, the bulk of *Killer Snakes* never tops its incredible opening. And the pacing's way too erratic; i.e., semi-dull. But there are enough cobra attacks, fistfights and rooms full of angry creepycrawlers to make owning this tape a serious consideration.

Anyway, the *Snakes* tape offered by *Something Weird* is letterboxed and uncut. Like *The Bloody, The Beautiful, and The Bare*, it was taken from the only known surviving print. Unfortunately, *Killer*'s print has suffered some deterioration; little red speckles persistently dance in the middle of the picture throughout. Yet this damage actually enhanced my viewing experience—I felt like I was back at the drive-in!

A Smell of Honey, A Swallow of Brine! — (1964?), **1/2, Directed by Byron Mabe, With: Stacey Walker, Neville Coward. B&W, 71 minutes (*Something Weird*)

This pretty amazing nudie was written/produced by David Freidman, legendary exploitation king. Stacey Walker plays the ulti-

mate cocktease, driving men mad with her refusal to go all the way—that is, until she falls for *exactly* the wrong guy. Escalating hilarity abounds in this trashy mini-classic, one nicely shot by Laszle *Close Encounters* Kovao (masquerading as "Art Radford").

Incidentally, that's a pretty amazing title, too.



RETURN OF THE SON OF THE POLITICAL RANT

Time out for a few words on the upcoming Presidential election.

Longtime *Rough Cuts* readers are no doubt aware of my deep-rooted loathing for the shabby Republican-weasels currently "guiding" our government. However, I've recently been chastised for not slicing Democratic nominee Bill Clinton with an equally savage hand.

No problem, folks. Herewith my take on both candidates.

BILL CLINTON'S most revealing characteristic is his ever-present smirk. This nasty little smile carries a particularly odious whiff of backroom, good ole' boy politics. Of course, facial tics do not a monster make; still, I'm amazed Clinton's handlers haven't wiped that expression off his face. Because Clinton's smugness made me suspicious enough to undertake a cursory examination of his record, a search that quickly uncovered far more ominous traits.

One is Clinton's membership in the infamous Trilateral Commission, an elitist big-business combine which has repeatedly proven itself to not exactly be a community-oriented special interest group. Furthermore, back home in Arkansas, Clinton's known as Governor Chicken. Why? Because more chickens are raised in that state (relatively speaking) than

anywhere else in the country.

So what, you say. Ah, but where did those chickens come from? From the large contributions Bill Clinton accepted from a powerful businessman named Tyson, who holds massive chicken interests. The result of this relationship is that Arkansas now has the dubious distinction of being one of this nation's most highly polluted states, primarily because of Arkansas's mostly unregulated, shamefully indiscriminate dumping of unwanted chicken parts (not to mention chicken shit) in its numerous streams and lakes.

Sort of cancels out the pro-environmental posturing of Clinton's running mate, Al Gore, doesn't it?

Therefore, Clinton's relationship with Tyson suggests he may be no better than George Bush; like our wrongly beloved Prez, Bill Clinton could be bought and paid for.

But I can hear it now—"Bought and paid for?!" The President of the United States? How dare you suggest such a thing?!"

Because the more you learn about GEORGE BUSH, the more you gotta hate the guy—even if you ignore his disastrous economic record or opportunistic puritanism or general incompetence. The fact is, this sniveling cur is essentially owned by a small group of about 100 people, mostly corporate types, who've built up a nice little exclusive club for themselves. And George Bush has worked out a equally nice relationship with them. In return for the millions of dollars this club keeps at George's disposal to maintain himself in office, all Bush has to do is what the club tells him.

Unfortunately, we've already had eight years of a brokered Presidency under Ronald Reagan. Look where that got us.

So no more Bush, ok?
Please.

This leaves a question—who's

Paul Sammon going to vote for? Well, good friend (and excellent artist) Rick Geary recently told me that he thought of 1992 as a "Pink Baboon Year." Meaning Rick would just as soon vote for a pink baboon than reelect George Bush.

I agree. But since no pink baboons have shown up in the polls lately (only a yellow Perot), my vote—reluctantly—goes to Clinton.

Simply because he's the evil of two lessers.

Whatever your own opinion, however, just remember to act on the final word in Tom Robbins' recent film *Bob Roberts*. That's a word of particular relevance in the current political atmosphere of hypocritical moralizing, greedy profiteering and national neglect, a word doubly important if this column sees print before the November elections.

The word is—VOTE!

VIDEOS REDUX

More Hong Kong Horrors

I admit it—I'm hooked. Chinese genre films, whether crime, horror, or comedy, are imbued with such innocent vitality and explosive exaggeration that they're rapidly becoming my favorite subgenre. In fact, I haven't so adored a form of trans-American entertainment since the Italian gothic cinema of the early 1960's.

Then again, Asian trash cinema (as these Chinese genre pictures are more commonly called) is the Ninties equivalent of Italian horror movies. Here are a few good ones, most of which can be ordered from: *Video Mania*, Suite 129, 2520 N. Lincoln, Chicago, IL 60614. (312)929-7205.

Black Cat — (1991/Chinese),
***, Science Fiction/Action, Directed

by Stephen Shin/Dickson Poon, With:
Jade Leung, Simon Yam. Color, 101
minutes (Rainbow Audio & Video In-
corporation)

This surprisingly intelligent, incredibly violent Asian twist on *La Femme Nikita* tells of a young woman's brain being fitted with a microchip to control her fits of rage. Unfortunately, the implant also turns her into a ruthless government assassin. Cynical, adult and satisfying.

Infra Man — (1976/Chinese),
**1/2, Fantasy/Science Fiction, Di-
rected by Hua-Shan, With: Hsiu-
Hsien, Terry Liu, Wang Shieh, Wuah
Man-Tzu, Lin Wen-Wei. Color, 90
minutes, (Prism Entertainment)

Absurd yet endearing comic-book nonsense comes off like a Chinese homage to a particularly demented Japanese monster movie. "Plot" concerns the diabolical Princess Dragon Mom(!), who has risen from her underground realm to conquer the surface world via ludicrous dialogue and hyperactive mutants. Enter superhero *Infra Man*, whose "thunderball fists" are powered by "adrenaline and a miniature nuclear reactor." Non-stop barrage of bizarre costumes, outlandish situations, and knuckle-headed fun was another early Shaw Brothers attempt to diversify their kung-fu craze.

Lewd Lizard — (1985/Chinese),
**1/2, Horror/Sex, Directed by Wang
Hsiung With: Wai Wang, Yukari
Oshima. Color, 82 minutes, (Rain-
bow Audio & Video Incorporation)

Bad film buffs should adore this nasty, unclassifiable sex trash, which begins when a jolted lover starts stealing women's panties to collect their precious "underwear fluids". He then injects these fluids into the bodies of little lizards. Said reptiles transform into aggressive sexual warriors, scuttling up ladies' orifices to drive them mad

with pain. And pleasure.
Only in Hong Kong!

SECOND THOUGHTS

Hellraiser 3

Last column I gave *Hellraiser 3: Hell On Earth* a rating of three stars. Unfortunately, that critique was based on an uncut workprint I caught in Milan, a screening that was probably unduly influenced by too much cappuccino and a wildly enthusiastic Italian audience.

I've now caught the official theatrical version. Sad to say, something's been lost in the trims. *Hellraiser 3* suffers from a talky first half that sputters into a fairly pointless second hour of endless explosions; Doug Bradley's still good in his dual role as Pinhead/Elliot, though.

Anyway, let's downgrade that initial rating to a (generous) **1/2 stars.

RECOMMENDED REGIONAL VIDEO STORES

The Naked Eye

It's always a pleasure to discover a personable, hitherto unknown outlet that stocks the type of alternative videos I live for. So, anyone who finds themselves in the San Francisco area (as I did last Labor Day) should stop in at *The Naked Eye*, 533 Haight Street, San Francisco, CA 94117. (415)864-2985. This shop has an excellent cross-section of horror, exploitation and trash videos (mostly for rent); they also carry 'zines like *Video Watchdog* and *Psychotronic Video*. Owner Steven Michael Chack (whose business card reads "Schlockmeister") is an enthusiastic genre buff, too. Tell'em *Rough Cuts* sent you.

◆ THE VIDEO WATCHDOG BOOK

Tim Lucas Delivers

Speaking of *Video Watchdog*, editors Tim and Donna Lucas have just put out *The Video Watchdog Book*—and it's a winner. This book collects and updates all of the *Video Watchdog* columns which previously appeared in *Gorezone*, *Fangoria*, *Film Comment*, and *Video Times*; in the process, this volume becomes an invaluable compendium of research, retitlings and revisions.

Video Watchdog sometimes takes heat as being only for anal retentives obsessing after ultra-obscure videos. Don't you believe it—both book and magazine are essential items for anyone who loves fantastic cinema. You can order a copy of this handsomely bound, authoritatively written volume directly from Tim and Donna themselves. Send \$19.95 to: *Video Watchdog Books*, P.O. Box 5283, Cincinnati, OH 45205-0283. (513)471-8989.

◆ CABLE TV

TNT: *Turner's Atonement*

If you only think of Ted Turner in terms of his colorized desecrations, better think again; Turner's TNT cable outlet is rapidly becoming one of the most important genre film outlets in the United States.

Every Friday night, on 100% *Weird*, TNT has been airing pristine prints of two or three pictures that aren't yet on video, films with titles like *Face Behind the Mask*, *Mr. Sardonicus* and *The Mask of Fu-Manchu*. Then, once a month, *Monstervision* has their own screenings of not-on-tape titles like *Robinson Crusoe On Mars*.

So load up those VCRs, kids.

If you have cable TV, you won't find an easier way to dub excellent-looking copies of obscure, important or just plain trashy gems.

◆ LASERDISCS

Harryhausen Ill-Served

The 7th Voyage of Sinbad — ***1/2, *Fantasy*, Directed by Nathan Juran, With: Kerwin Matthews, Kathryn Grant, Richard Eyer, Torin Thatcher. Color, 87 minutes, (Pioneer Special Edition Laserdisc)

Speaking of TNT, they recently ran a moderately good-looking print of *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*, a classic Arabian nights fantasy graced with awesome Ray Harryhausen stop-motion effects. So why does the print on the pricey (\$59.98) Pioneer Special Edition Laserdisc seem so washed out? The *Voyage* scene here suspiciously looks like the same inferior one used on prior videotapes. C'mon, Pioneer; I've seen this picture many times, in both 16mm and 35mm, and there has to be some superior *Sinbad* source material somewhere, ones that retain the rich, vibrant Technicolor hues of the original.

Of course, Pioneer has done a service with this disc by restoring *The 7th Voyage's* original stereo soundtrack. Then again, if it's good sound you want, why not just buy a CD of B. Herrmann's masterly score?

That's a heck of a lot cheaper than spending \$59.98!

◆ RECOMMENDED FILM FANZINES

Herewith a short continuation of my alphabetized "best of" list:

Headpress (David Kere-

kes/David Slater, P.O. Box 160, Stockport, Cheshire, SK1 4ET, England)

This English 'zine promises "a white knuckle ride through the last days of civilization". Topics have so far included bondage magazines, reviews of Jodorowsky's *Santa Sangre*, erotic comic art, the early films of David Cronenberg, and "pornography and the Church." Energetic, riveting, and thoroughly convinced that we're all witnessing the final days of Apocalypse. *Headpress* just keeps getting better (and wilder!) each ish.

The Last Prom: Eclectic Esoterica For A Better Tomorrow (Ralph Coon, 137 South San Fernando Blvd., Box 243, Burbank, CA 91502)

This is a short, cheap (\$1.00) but professional 'zine dedicated to the "many topics the 'popular media' doesn't invest time in because the mentally bankrupt masses don't care to learn about them." Each issue covers a different theme. Number one's was the well-researched "The Driver's Education Film," from which I cribbed most of the Wyman and Deems info in my earlier *Highway Safety Films* review.

Editor Ralph Coon promises that issue #2 will contain "in-depth research into the sexiest man on television . . . spunky television evangelist Dr. Gene Scott." That's great news, since Scott's long been my favorite media eccentric (even if I'm sure he's just as dirty as the rest of the TV-Evangelist weasels). Hurry up and get #2 out, Ralph!

Answer Me! (Jim Goad, Goad to Hell Enterprises, 6520 Selma Avenue, Suite 1171, Hollywood, CA 90028. (213)462-8252)

This high quality, witty 'zine should have been included in my "A" listings, since it's one of the most important independent publications released this year.

Very well-written, issue #2 (which costs a measly \$2.50) has perceptive interviews with the likes of Ray Dennis Steckler (famed director of *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed Up Zombies*), Anton LaVey (founder of the Church of Satan), Al Goldstein (publisher of *Screw*) and David Duke (plastic politician and former Grand Wizard of the KKK). *ANSWER ME #2* also features absorbing articles on Mexican murder magazines and Vietnamese gangs in Orange County, California.

But issue two's most incredible achievement is "Night of a Hundred Mass-Murdering Serial-Killing Stars." This staggeringly informational compendium on "the

hundred most fabulous killers of our time" compiles the "careers" of everyone from Ted Bundy to Albert Fish to Jeffrey Dahmer, in exhaustive detail. Included are complete body counts, biographical backgrounds, and weapons of choice; the sheer research involved here must have been overwhelming. And depressing.

Or maybe not. Editor John Goad professes to a "boundless contempt for Homo Sapiens." I believe him; behind *Answer Me's* solid writing and exceptional layout lies an intensely nihilistic attitude, one that makes the splatterpunks look like the Care Bears. In fact, the best thing about *Answer Me*—it's dry, mocking intelligence—is also the most unnerv-

ing. So be prepared. Reading this publication is like listening to Death. Laughing.



It's a wrap.

Next time we'll have more of everything, plus—I swear—my long-delayed *Essential Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy Film Book Library*.

In the meantime, don't forget to vote. And if George Bush has already won, I think I'll become a drug addict.

Then again, why put more money in his pocket?

Maybe I'll throw in the towel and become a Rotarian instead...



THE COMING OF LOCUSTS

Tony Fitzpatrick

SHEBA PUBLISHING INTRODUCES a new book of poetry and etchings from Tony Fitzpatrick, *The Coming of Locusts*. Fitzpatrick is a contributing artist to *Hard Looks*, author of two other collections of poetry, *The Hard Angels*, and *The Neighborhood*.

The Coming of Locusts is a collection of poems and images.

The work of Tony Fitzpatrick is filled with baseball ghosts, pit bulls, prize fighters, small-time thieves, and prayers. He shows us an edge of hope in a mean world.

The Coming of Locusts is an extraordinary work.

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CD REVIEWS

BOOKS, VIDEOS, SOFTWARE...

Books

Poppy Brite, *Lost Souls*, and Dell Abyss

The Dell Abyss line of horror novels touts itself as the "cutting edge" of contemporary horror, publishing work that is different or more stylistically daring than that found anywhere else. This remains to be seen. While certainly courageous in the simple fact that they launched a horror line when everyone else was announcing the death of horror, the quality of the Abyss line has been, with a few shining exceptions, exceptionally poor. From the laughable (Rick Reed, Ron Dee), to the pretentiously inept (Kathe Koja, Kelly Wilde), to the extremely gifted (Brian Hodge, Melanie Tem) with a few classics thrown in for good measure (Dennis Etchison, Michael McDowell, Silva and Olson), the Abyss line has not lived up to either their credo or their hype. The announcement that they had acquired one of the great young talents in horror today—Poppy Brite—provided a glimmer of hope for the line. Unfortunately, the problem seems to be with Abyss itself: the exceptional Poppy Brite has delivered a first novel that has the same weaknesses evident in other Abyss books.

With only a handful of stories Poppy Brite has proven herself to be one of the most unique and talented horror writers to emerge in recent years. In *Lost Souls* (Dell Abyss, \$18.00), those strengths of style and tone that set her apart are all in evidence. But there is something odd about this book, something that doesn't quite work despite the high quality of writing. It fails where most other Abyss books fail: it does not satisfy, and it shoots for a type of daring,

avant-garde style that Abyss editors are apparently ill-equipped to handle. Too many Abyss books seem to go into some prose grinder that spews out elliptical sentences and flat characters. This is where *Lost Souls*, among others, runs aground.

Lost Souls could be flippantly described as a gay vampire novel, but it is, of course, more than that. (There is only one major woman character, and even she doesn't have much of a role.) The alternating storylines concern Ghost and Steve of the alternative band *Lost Souls*?; Christian, a 383 year old vampire; Nothing, a teenage runaway; and Zillah, Twig, and Molochai, three vampires roaming the countryside in a black van. We follow these people in a kind of vaguely Kerouacian road novel as their paths converge, cross, and converge again, with Nothing becoming the nexus point around which the story—such as it is—eventually revolves.

Brite's strength lies in her exquisite, highly evocative, decadent prose, which creates a mood and atmosphere wholly unlike that found in the work of any other writer. At her best Brite reaches those depraved heights conjured by J.K. Huysmans in *La-Bas* and *A Rebours* and Baudelaire in *Fleurs du Mal*. She has meticulously crafted a subculture of vampires and alternative rock, although one with uncomfortable similarities to that created by Wendy Snow-Lang in her *Night's Children* series of graphic novels. Everyone in *Lost Souls* looks and acts like refugees from a Bauhaus concert, with punked out hair, black eye-liner, and enough clove cigarettes to choke Peter Murphy. This subculture lives and breathes, and hardly a hint of the "real world" intrudes. Brite plunges the reader into a perverse, ugly world of her own invention, and she never falters in the creation and depiction of that world.

Unfortunately, there isn't a whole lot beyond this. *Lost Souls* is a book desperately in search of a plot and some sense of narrative drive. The characters are so brutal and ugly that we simply cannot like or care for them, and so we merely wallow in their angst-ridden nihilism. The only character that borders on being sympathetic—Ghost—is a cipher who is passive throughout most of the story, a mere observer. This tends to be the problem with what is described as “the new horror”: we simply do not care about these people, so how can we care about what happens to them or involve ourselves intimately in their world? As with *The Cipher*, we are kept at arms length from the characters by too many stylistic tricks. For some reason, people began thinking that nihilism was scary and “gritty” characterization was true-to-life; but nihilism is merely boring and sophomoric, and “gritty” characterization too often means a 300 page wallow with people we would cross the street to avoid. Thus fails *Lost Souls*, *The Cipher*, and at least half of the Abyss line.

If this sounds like a negative review, it is a reluctant one. Poppy Brite is a brilliant writer, there is no doubt about that, and she will certainly continue to be a force in the field of horror. *Lost Souls*, for all its strengths of style, mood, and atmosphere, is just not a likable book. It is undoubtably unique, and there is much to read and enjoy in it. But in the end, it simply fails to involve the reader in its story, which brings us back to the Abyss line as a whole. The tone of the Abyss books was set by the debut title, Kathe Koja's *The Cipher*. For some reason critics touted this rather badly written and uninvolved novel as a new direction in horror. Koja is certainly in no class with Brite as a writer, but each has similar failings, the same failings to which so many Abyss books fall prey. Somewhere along the line, people began to think elliptical, mock-avant-garde prose with disjointed narrative structure was daring and new. Well, maybe it is, when it's done skillfully. Steve Rasnic Tem, Nancy Holder and Tom Ligotti have certainly pushed horror prose into new realms. Unfortunately, neither Koja nor Kelly Wilde (the other paragon of this let's-screw-with-syntax-and-punctuation-and-call-it-style school of writing) do not have the talent to pull it off. Poppy Brite does. While Brite's quirky prose is pure poetry, Kathe Koja wouldn't know a balanced line of prose if she tripped over it and Wilde has a tin ear. We can only hope that this “new direction in horror” follows the likes of Brian Hodge, the promise of Poppy Brite, and the best moments of some other Abyss titles, while leaving behind the *faux-litterateur* of the line's lowest moments

— T. Liam McDonald

Nightmare, by S.K. Epperson, Donald I. Fine, Inc., Sept. 1992, 284 pp., hc, \$20.00, ISBN 1-55611-287-4

In addition to being one of the best of the new horror/dark suspense writers, S.K. Epperson is also one of the most prolific. *Nightmare* is the third Epperson novel I've reviewed in the past year (*Dumford Blood* and *Borderland* are the other two) within these pages, and it's the best of the lot, too.

Nightmare's plot revolves around a clinic for women suffering from multiple personality disorders, a clinic whose patients are killing themselves, seemingly at the urging of their alternate personas. It's a intriguing idea, and one which is handled quite well; rather than drown the reader in dull, overly-technical medical and psychological terms and explanations, Epperson passes on, early in the book's narrative, just enough information on multiple personality disorders to fuel the plot and to give the reader a basic understanding of what they are. Things are kept lean and mean, as they should be in a good thriller, which is one thing I really admired about this book; *Nightmare's* plot is tight and well-crafted, with no needless sub-plots or other unnecessary diversions.

Characterization has always been one of Epperson's strong points, and *Nightmare's* no exception. All the characters are well-rounded and believable, with the cliched, one-sided caricatures so often found in this type of fiction thankfully absent. No one is perfect, everyone has their flaws, and that makes relating to the characters all that much easier. While the book's villains (whose identity I won't reveal) are a rather twisted lot, you can't help but feel sorry for them; they commit their crimes not because they're amoral or evil, or because they're trying to do something ludicrous like destroy all life as we know it, but for very human, personal reasons which are easy to understand, and even empathize with. The goals they seek are plain to see, even if the means they're using to obtain them are more than a little sick.

If you haven't read any of Epperson's writing before, *Nightmare* is a great place to start. Like all of Epperson's other works, it's a tightly-paced, finely-written book with more than its share of surprises and a good helping of gloriously sick black humor, too. Recommended.

— Mike Baker

The Wildlings, by Scott Ciencin, Zebra, October 1992, 415 pp., mmp, \$4.50, ISBN 0-8217-3934-4

The Wildlings is the sequel to/continuation of Ciencin's *The Vampire Odyssey*, which I reviewed in these pages a couple of issues back. *The Wildlings*

continues the adventures of half-human, half-vampire Danielle Walthers and her adoptive mother Samantha in (seemingly) vampire-infested Los Angeles. Like Ciencin's previous book, *The Wildlings* is fast-paced and exciting, with more than its share of cliffhanger-ending chapters. If you like quick, enjoyable reads, then this book is for you.

In many ways, *The Wildlings* (which, in case you were wondering, is a descriptive term for vampires who kill other vampires) is a better book than *The Vampire Odyssey*. The pacing is better this time around and the plotting more deftly handled; *The Wildlings* is as much a mystery as a horror novel, and like any good mystery, it has a goodly amount of plot twists (including one really well thought out, and surprising, one). But it's also not without its flaws. Some of the action sequences push believability a little too far (especially the helicopter scene, and the face-off in the tower at the end), there's a few too many film references (not as many James Cameron ones this time, though), and one explicit sex scene which goes on *way* too long.

My biggest complaint about *The Wildlings* is an area which you don't encounter all that often: technical description overload. When faced with describing something they know little of, like nuclear physics or non-Euclidean geometry, most writers just wing it, and end up looking silly in the process. The reverse can be just as embarrassing, though; when faced with something they know little of, the writer does a lot of research into the subject, peppers their work with technical terms, and ends up looking just as silly. In *The Wildlings*, Dani, who is a medical student, has honed her vampiric powers to the degree where she can, through mind control, alter a person's psychological well-being (i.e. she can heal, and harm, a person by mentally altering their bodily functions). The only problem is, every time she does this, it's like Internal Anatomy 101. Now the mondo-techno words fit in the first time Dani uses these new-found powers (after a multi-car freeway pileup), but subsequent appearances just slow down the flow of the book; nothing throws off the pacing of an action sequence like the sudden appearance of multi-syllable technical terms like parasympathetic ephrans and peripheral vaso constriction.

Thankfully, these technical overload occurrences are few and far between and, when you consider how much fun the rest of the book is, easily forgivable. I enjoyed *The Wildlings* and look forward to the final book in the series, *Parliament of Blood*. Not much hype is being spread about the appearance of Scott Ciencin on the horror scene, but he's someone to watch out for nonetheless. Give him a chance and I'm sure he'll go far. Recommended.

— Mike Baker

Lost Souls, by Poppy Z. Brite, Abyss/Delacorte Press, Nov. 1992, 359 pp., hc, \$18.00, ISBN 0-385-30875-2

Lost Souls is Poppy Brite's debut novel, and it's also the first book in Abyss' new hardcover line. A lot of effort is being put into marketing this book, including a nifty-looking advance reading copy (the nicest I've seen since Straub's *Houses Without Doors*) for book-sellers and reviewers covered with a truly ghastly amount of blurbs, some of which give new meaning to the word hyperbolic.

Does *Lost Souls* live up to all the hype? While I don't agree that it succeeds in "... capturing the dark literary decadence of this waning millennium" (to quote one of the blurbs), it is clever, original, and filled with lush, highly-evocative imagery. The plot deals with modern day vampires (Nobody, a confused boy who discovers his true heritage; Zillah, Twig and Molochai, bloodsucking sociopaths on an endless road trip; and Christian, who is older, more restrained, and longs for the freedom the others seemingly possess) and the people who have the misfortune to be drawn into their nocturnal lives. Though a bit on the rambling side, *Lost Souls'* plot did hold my attention, and there were some nice twists, especially near the end. The characterization was interesting (I particularly liked Christian; his understated, day-to-day lifestyle is much easier to relate to than the hedonistic ultra-violence of the other vampires), the dialogue was unusually good (though it did become contrived at times), and the imagery, as I already stated, was excellent.

But, like all books, *Lost Souls* has its share of flaws. For example, imagery is often placed before logic, with the end result being a series of finely-written scenes which, when you stop to think about them, make little sense. And reality is stretched a bit when it comes to coincidences, too. The world where *Lost Souls* takes place was far too small for my taste; it seemed like the characters were constantly bumping into each other, no matter how contrived the circumstances. A little of this kind of thing goes a long way, and there was far too much of it going on in *Lost Souls*. For example, having Christian run into Nothing's grandfather years later is pushing coincidence a bit; having Nothing encounter him too is taking coincidence and shoving it off a cliff (the same goes for the van picking up Laine, and a few other crucial plot points). How much you enjoy *Lost Souls* will probably depend upon your feelings of style over substance; if you prefer the former over the latter, then this is a book you'll truly cherish, otherwise you'll probably just find it an enjoyable read. Any way you look at it, though, you have to admit that it is a pretty impressive debut. Poppy Z. Brite is definitely a writer who'll go far, or, as Harlan Ellison

put it, "This is a voice we're going to be hearing for a long time."

— Mike Baker

Nightworld, by F. Paul Wilson, Dark Harvest Books, \$21.95, ISBN 0-913165-71-9

Nightworld is not only the final volume of Wilson's *Reborn* trilogy, it also features characters from three previously independent novels: *The Keep*, *The Tomb*, and *The Touch*; thereby finishing up a six-book series.

In *The Keep*, Wilson introduced a timeless evil entity that was seemingly vanquished at the end of the story. In *Reborn*, the entity returns in embryonic form. In *Reprisal*, the second in the trilogy, it grows and matures while managing to elude the small group of valiant heroes who have pledged to destroy it. Now in *Nightworld*, comes the final titanic battle for Earth and humanity.

Huge, bottomless holes suddenly begin to appear throughout the world. By day, there is only a strange, eerie downdraft, but at sunset the airflow reverses, bringing with it a vile assortment of monsters. Big things, little things, flying things, and crawling things that attack humans and animals indiscriminately. Even though the monsters must return to their holes by dawn, that's little consolation because the daylight hours are rapidly shrinking to the point where darkness will become permanent.

Although I happen to like series heroes such as Conan or Indiana Jones, who regularly embark on a variety of different adventures, I don't care much for trilogies or series that take anywhere from five to ten books to complete what is essentially one long story.

However, Wilson does an admirable job of making *Nightworld* a self-contained novel. Even readers who are completely unfamiliar with the previous books should have no trouble understanding and enjoying *Nightworld*.

— Roman A. Ranieri

Gone South, by Robert R. McCammon, Pocket Books, \$22.00, ISBN 0-671-74306-6

Gone South is McCammon's third attempt to introduce his work to the vast (and quite lucrative) mainstream audience. Although both *Mine* and *Boy's Life* contained at least some minor elements of horror, they were primarily aimed at a mainstream readership. McCammon, who has stated in several interviews that he is finished with the horror genre, is undoubtedly exasperated that *Mine* and *Boy's Life* both received the HWA's Bram Stoker Award for outstanding horror

novel during the past two years.

No matter how McCammon chooses to classify his work, his storytelling talent is as sharp as it ever was.

Gone South is the story of Dan Lambert, a Vietnam vet suffering from terminal cancer due to his exposure to Agent Orange during the war. But that isn't all, Lambert's situation steadily worsens. His wife divorces him and takes their teenaged son, and the local bank threatens to repossess his pickup truck.

Knowing that he will have little chance of finding work as a carpenter without his truck, Lambert goes to see the new loan officer. The meeting becomes increasingly hostile until, in a shocking flash of fear and confusion, the loan officer is shot and killed. Lambert panics and flees to the swamplands of Louisiana.

The outraged bank announces a substantial reward for Lambert's capture, which leads to a heated pursuit by two utterly bizarre and thoroughly memorable bounty hunters: Pelvis Easley—an unemployed Elvis impersonator—and Flint Murtaugh, a refugee from a traveling freak show.

The subsequent chase and action scenes are fast-paced and deftly handled. McCammon also displays a refreshing sense of humor in several genuinely funny sequences.

Gone South just might be the novel that attracts the mainstream audience McCammon has been ardently courting. But it's also a book that his legion of horror fans should enjoy.

— Roman A. Ranieri

Foundations of Fear: An Exploration of Horror, edited by David G. Hartwell, Tor Books, \$27.50, ISBN 0-312-85074-3

With this new companion volume to his earlier anthology, *The Dark Descent*, Hartwell clearly establishes himself as one of the most knowledgeable editors currently exploring the horror genre.

Not only does this huge book contain first-class stories from horror luminaries such as Peter Straub, H.P. Lovecraft, Arthur Machen, Clive Barker, and Richard Matheson; it also features several superbly horrific tales from mainstream authors like Thomas Hardy, Carlos Fuentes, E.T.A. Hoffman, and Daphne Du Maurier.

These names alone should be enough to convince most horror fans to invest in a copy of this hefty tome, but wait, there's more. Also included are a number of important novellas that are not easy to find unless you happen to know which old anthologies and collections to look for. "They" by Robert A. Heinlein, "Sandkings" by George R.R. Martin, "Who Goes There?" by John W. Campbell, "... and my fear is great" by

Theodore Sturgeon, "Faith of Our Fathers" by Philip K. Dick, and "Bloodchild" by Octavia Butler are just a few prominent examples.

Although I know that many readers prefer original collections, there is one major advantage with a reprint anthology: since the editor is free to choose from the very best in the field, all of the included stories are bonafide winners.

— Roman A. Ranieri

Videos

THE FAMILY VALUES FILM FESTIVAL

That's right, boys and girls, it's time for the Family Values Film Festival, where we celebrate the old-fashioned basic values that have made America the strongest, richest and most morally upright country in the world. The list of videos we could play at this festival is long, so we'll have to be brief.

First, there's *The Addams Family* (1991, Paramount), a family that really believes the old saying: "The family that plays together stays together." They're a close knit, loving, extended family, even though they might be a little different. George Bush and Dan Quayle would definitely approve of the love they have—and show—for one another, of their strong family values . . . although, it's doubtful they would approve of the family itself.

How about *The Godfather* (1972, Paramount), the first and best of the three-part series? Now *these* people have some *real* family values . . . and they don't care who they have to kill to stick to them.

Or *Psycho* (1960, MCA/Universal), the story of a boy's love for his mother. In the words of Norman Bates (played by the late, great Anthony Perkins): "Well, a boy's best friend is his mother." Admittedly, this is a single-mother situation, something this election's incumbents seem to frown upon . . . but there is a strong, loving bond there, don't you think?

Then there's a little movie called *Parents* (1989, Vestron). Here we've got a family right out of the 1950s black-and-white television shows: Mom, Dad, and their son. They're happy and smiling and they never argue—Mom and Dad, that is. The little boy is rather brooding, because he can't figure out why his parents always have so much meat in the house . . . and he can't help wondering exactly what *kind* of meat it is . . .

Arthur and Annie Pope are strong and loving parents who want nothing but the very best for their two sons in *Running On Empty* (1988, Warner). Unfor-

tunately, because Arthur and Annie were student radicals in their youth and accidentally blinded a janitor when they blew up a napalm lab, they are still wanted by the government and must run with their sons in tow. Ironically, they are still able to cling to strong family values even as they run from the very government that is demanding that more people have these family values. (I don't know if this movie was intended to be scary, but it is!)

In *War of the Roses* (1989, CBS/Fox), Oliver and Barbara Rose have a son, a daughter and 18 years of marriage and family values behind them. In fact, this might be one of the few movies that truly points out what *real* families *really* value. The children are practically nonentities. The real stars are the Rose's *stuff*! And when the marriage falls apart and the word "Divorce!" is shouted like a battle-cry, the *stuff* is what they fight over. And it's a long, bitter ugly fight to the death. They are products of their environment, and their country, because—once again, ironically—they got their materialistic values from the very same government that has been trying to attach itself to "family values" and "tradition" . . . the same government that makes people hunger for money—more and more and more—so they can use that money to buy stuff—more and more and more—until their humanity has eroded so much that they value that stuff even above their own families . . . their spouses, their children, sometimes even their own lives . . .

But the movie that probably best captures and encapsulates the now all familiar cry of "family values!" is a movie that would probably be rejected by the very people who cry those words: *The Stepfather* (1987, Embassy). To Henry Morrison, family values mean everything. In fact, that's all he ever thinks about. He's looking for the perfect family, like the ones he's seen in *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It To Beaver* and *Ozzie and Harriet*. He manages to find single women, preferably widows, who already have children. He marries them, marries the family. And then, he tries hard—even *fights*—to turn them into the ideal, grace-saying, marshmallow-roasting, smiling, laughing family. When it doesn't work, he kills them. All of them. And moves on to the *next* fatherless family. Yes, this is a very suspenseful, terrifying movie. The script, co-written by veteran writer Donald Westlake, works on every level, and there are fine performances all around, especially by Terry O'Quinn as Henry. But there's much more here than just a good movie. The single-mother family upon which the movie focuses was working just fine until Henry comes along and screws it up with his deluded need for the "perfect family" and for "family order." But even more than that, Henry Morrison fails to learn something that is very important. That perfect family does not exist.

anywhere; those black-and-white television images are absolutely nothing but *that*: images, fantasies, creations. Those families do *not* exist.

We can only hope and pray that George Bush and Dan Quayle *do* learn that lesson . . . without having to force their opinions on anyone else in ways that demean and humiliate so very many people—and so many functional families—throughout this country.

— Ray Garton

Software

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS. LucasArts — If you want to know the bottom line, you can stop reading this review right after the next sentence because I'm going to give it all away.

Hands down, for my money, *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis* (henceforth *IJFOA*) is the game of the year!

There's no debate on this one, folks; this is a beauty of a game.

I figure, because of the supernatural/occult overtones and fun sense of adventure, nearly anyone who reads *Cemetery Dance* must have at least a slightly more than casual interest in the *Indiana Jones* movies. If you have a computer, and if you want as close to the experience of a brand new *I.J.* movie as you'll ever get (because Harrison Ford will probably never reprise his famous role), look no further.

The storyline by Hal Barwood and Noah Falstein is classic "Jones." After finding the *Lost Dialogue of Plato*, Indy must decipher the clues and find the fabled Lost Continent before the Nazis do. It seems as though the ancients were in touch with some mighty heavy supernatural powers which, if harnessed by the Nazis, could lead them to world domination. Indy must stop them by finding Atlantis first. This time out, he's assisted (with some very humorous repartee along the way) by Sophia Hapgood, who has traded in archaeology for psychic research.

Believe me, I'm no computer game playing genius (Jesse, my ten-year-old son, can go a lot further than I can without losing his patience or resorting to a hint book), so one thing I look for in a game is something I can boot up and at least start to play without having to read a manual as thick as the New York City *Yellow Pages*. *IJFOA* goes one better; once you have the game loaded, you can play for hours before you have to look up anything (other than the copy protection code), and then it's usually a matter of reading maybe a paragraph or two before you can continue.

The game is driven by a simple point and click icon menu. Want to go somewhere? Point to the

location on the screen and click. Easy as falling off a log. Need something from your inventory? Point and click on *USE*. Bingo.

What sets *IJFOA* apart from most adventure games, however, is that there are three games, not just one, inside of Indy's quest. Approximately a third of the way into the game, you are offered a three-way choice. If you like puzzles, you can follow the "Wits" path. Want to swing some fists along the way? Take the "Fists" path. And if you'd prefer some help as you go, take the "Team" path, and Sophia will offer some timely assistance. Once you've picked an option, you're on a path that will—eventually—lead you to Atlantis, which is roughly another third of the game, the same end-game for all three paths. After you crack the secrets of the Lost Continent, you can go back to the decision point and follow another route to Atlantis.

Can't beat that, can you? Three distinctively different games with their own playing styles in one package.

But *IJFOA* goes one even one better than that because the designers at LucasArts seem to realize something most other game companies don't, and that is that playing a computer game is not supposed to feel like the designers have invented a remarkably detailed combination lock, and all you have to do is pick it apart *exactly* the way they programmed it. Having one and *only* one way to solve the adventure can lead to immense frustration.

But every puzzle along the way in *IJFOA* has more than one solution, so different responses will get you different results, some of which will work and some that won't. The beauty of this is, you, the player, actually feel like you are *playing* the game by controlling everything that happens. The game seems to respond to the individual player's style of play, so it offers unique surprises along every path you choose.

And even better than that, the game doesn't let you progress far unless you've picked up whatever you're going to need in that particular scene. This way, you don't end up in Algiers, say, and realize that you should have grabbed a few items back in Monte Carlo; and the game doesn't come to a crashing halt where you have to dump hours of play time to get restarted.

What a concept!

I know it's a cliché for a reviewer to say, "This is one game I'll come back to time and time again," but for the first time in my computer gaming experience, I can honestly make that claim. *IJFOA* is absolutely the most fun and involving game I've played since . . . well, since LucasArts' *Their Finest Hour*. Boy, are they doing things right.

In my book, *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis* is the game of the year for this year and maybe even next year!

— Rick Hautala

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